

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!

Revolutionary Communist Group

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PAUL MATTSSON

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No way forward with the Labour Party

The last few months has seen a remarkable change in the political fortunes of the Labour Party. Labour's dramatic victory in the mid-Staffs by-election and its commanding lead in the opinion polls show that it is now defeating the Tories in the battle for semi-detached Britain - for the votes of the middle class and better off sections of the working class.

Two factors lie behind this development. The first is the state of the British economy and the failure of Thatcherism over ten years to halt and reverse Britain's relative economic decline. The second is the collapse of the so-called 'centre' parties of British politics - the Liberal/SDP Alliance. Together, this has allowed an increasingly rightward shifting Labour Party to take over the 'centre' ground of British politics and become a pole of attraction for disaffected Tory and ex-Alliance voters as deteriorating economic conditions now take their toll on the living standards of semi-detached Britain.

A PARTY FIT FOR SEMI-DETACHED BRITAIN

Immediately after the Tory victory in the 1987 election FRFI argued that the election was about which party would gain parliamentary power by winning the allegiance of semi-detached Britain. The poor and oppressed never featured in the election except as objects of pity and patronage used by the Labour Party to stir the consciences of the middle classes. No parliamentary party represents the interests of the low paid, the poor, the unemployed and the oppressed. Labour, we argued, can only get to power by abandoning any serious pretence to defend their interests. For this reason, in today's conditions, parliamentary democracy is a sham for growing sections of the working class. (FRFI 65)

Kinnock, since becoming leader of the Labour Party, has ruthlessly pursued the programme he set himself during his campaign to become leader of the party - to make it fit for semi-detached Britain. At that time he said:

... we can only protect the disadvantaged in our society if we appeal to those who are relatively advantaged. The apparent overconcentration of our energies and resources on these groups like the poor, the unemployed and the minorities - does a disservice both to them and to ourselves... if we are to be of real use to the deprived and insecure we must have the support of those in more secure social circumstances - the home owners as well as the homeless, the stable family as well as the unemployed, the

majority as well as the minorities.'

To win the votes of the relatively advantaged, the home owners and the stable families, he has ruthlessly dealt with opposition in the Labour Party. Threatening, bullying and expelling all those who stood in his path, abandoning any position which would alienate his chosen constituency, using advertising agencies to promote the correct image, Kinnock knocked his party into shape. However in 1987 the Tories managed to engineer a mini-boom and the centre parties still had significant credibility. Semi-detached Britain decided that its privileges were safer with the Tories. Kinnock would have to bide his time. Nearly three years on, deteriorating economic conditions have coincided fortuitously with the collapse of the centre parties. Kinnock's time has come.

NO HOME FOR SEMI-DETACHED BRITAIN

The British economy is in serious trouble. Inflation is set to rise over nine per cent; interest rates are at 15 per cent with further rises not ruled out; the current account deficit was £20.85bn in 1989 with the 'invisibles' account in deficit for the final quarter of 1989 - the first time since records began in 1955. There is little sign of any dramatic turnaround and the pound is coming under sustained pressure from the currency markets.

Manufacturing investment fell by 12 per cent in the last quarter of 1989 and after 11 years of Thatcher's 'economic miracle', in spite of the windfall benefits of North Sea Oil and privatisation revenues, is again lower than when the Tories took office. In January provisional figures show a fall in output of production industries of 0.7 per cent and UK productivity began to decline last year for the first time since 1986 while wage costs per unit of production reached 10.1 per cent.

The financial deficit of Britain's industrial and commercial companies trebled to £23.37bn in 1989 or 4.6 per cent of the GDP. This is the first time since the mid-1960s that the company sector has operated with a financial deficit for three successive years. A squeeze on profits is inevitable, and as output slows down unemployment will begin to rise again. There is little room for manoeuvre, as the Budget figures showed, and it becomes increasingly unlikely that the Tories will be able to engineer another mini-boom before the next election.

The overall economic policies of the Tories have been little short of disastrous. Their successes have been short term and political ones. By redistributing wealth from the poorer sections of the

working class to the middle classes and the rich, and by withdrawing resources from the public sector, Thatcher was able to sustain her electoral base. Today all that has changed. The economic crisis is now undermining the living standards of semi-detached Britain and the Poll Tax is uniting the nation against her government.

Social class categories C1 and C2 include the majority of those covered by our category 'semi-detached Britain'. The former consists of supervisory and clerical workers, and junior managerial, administrative and professional staff. The latter refers to skilled manual workers. These are the people who switched in significant numbers to Thatcher in the 1979 election and voted three times for her. They accounted for virtually all the increase to 66 per cent from 56 per cent of owner occupied housing in the UK in the 1980s. It is their living standards which are being significantly lowered by high interest and mortgage rates. The Poll Tax is the last straw.

The areas where the support for the Tories has determined the outcome of elections include the most heavily indebted regions of the country. The South East and Greater London have the greater number of mortgage holders and higher average debt per holder than elsewhere. The next are the East and West Midlands. In Greater London a one percentage point rise in interest rates costs borrowers £240m and gives investors £197m - a net loss of £43m. The West Midlands loses £29m and the East Midlands £16m. The South East with its large number of building society investors loses only £2.1m.

The most heavily mortgaged social groups are C1 and C2. Their total borrowings exceed their total investments by £4.2bn and £6.8bn respectively. They lose £42m and £68m from every one percentage point rise in mortgage rates. In the case of younger families in these social groups, the Poll Tax will almost certainly be higher than the rates and on top of the massive interest rates increases over the last two years significantly adds to their totally unexpected burden. The change in the political fortunes of the Labour Party, given the absence of other viable centre parties, results from the reaction, primarily to the burden of high interest rates, reinforced by the Poll Tax, of semi-detached Britain. (Information Financial Times 5 March 1990)

MID-STAFFS BY-ELECTION

The sweeping victory for Labour in the mid-Staffs by-election turning a Tory majority of 14,654 to a Labour one of 9,449, dramatically measured

the growing disillusionment of semi-detached Britain with Mrs Thatcher. The Labour candidate for Mid-Staffs was an ideal one. Mrs Heal was a middle class social worker from Surrey, articulate and smartly dressed and unlikely to cause offence to potential Tory defectors from semi-detached Britain. She was a Kinnock supporter who would never put principle before power. A former supporter of CND, in a speech at last year's Labour Party Conference she made this clear:

'I am not prepared to put the election of a Labour government at risk by clinging on to a unilateralist policy and I make no apologies for considering electoral chances at this time along with this issue.'

Mortgage-payers, voters in the age group (30-44), C1 and C2 voters were the main switchers to Labour in the by-election. The Harris ITN exit poll showed that Labour had a 36 per cent lead over the Tories among the crucial C2 voters. The main immediate concerns of voters questioned in the exit poll were the Poll Tax, significantly the NHS and mortgage/interest rates in that order. Labour almost doubled its vote in Mid-Staffs by winning ex-Tory voters and being 10 times as successful as the Tories in exploiting the collapse of the centre parties.

NO WAY FORWARD THROUGH LABOUR

The Labour Party fortunes have changed because it has moulded the party to serve the prejudices and needs of semi-detached Britain. To do this it has consciously demobilised any forces in and out of its ranks which are prepared to speak out for the more oppressed sections of the working class. Although the Poll Tax is an issue which can unite the majority of people in an active campaign to remove the Thatcher government, the Labour Party will not support an effective campaign against it because it would involve breaking the law. In short it will do nothing that moves it away from its class base in semi-detached Britain.

Class politics in Britain cannot advance through the Labour Party. Whether it wins or loses the next election the vast majority of the working class, who have suffered 10 years of Thatcher's onslaught, will be no better off. Class politics will arise again in Britain as recent developments around the anti-Poll Tax struggle have shown. The first condition of their success is that they put to the fore the interests of the more oppressed sections of the working class. The second is that they will have made a fundamental and irrevocable break with the Labour Party.



Homelessness

122% increase over 10 years

LORNA REID

On 13 March the government published figures showing that the number of families officially accepted as homeless by local authorities is rising at an annual rate of 14 per cent. In the last quarter of 1988, local authorities accepted responsibility for 27,800 homeless families. By the last quarter of 1989 the figure had increased to 31,840. Of these 5,700 were in inner London - a 37 per cent increase over 12 months. Nationally, 155,000 under 25 year olds will experience homelessness this year.

In the past 10 years it is calculated 1.5 million adults and 1.5 million children have been registered as homeless. At present there are 1.4 million households on council waiting lists and over 11,000 families in bed and breakfast hotels. Thousands of babies are spending their first two or three years of life in B&B hotels. Among the officially homeless there are disproportionate numbers of women and people from black and Asian communities. In London, a third of the homeless families are headed by a single parent, in most cases a woman.

House building is at an all time low. In 1979 89,000 were built but only 23,000 were built in 1987. The sale of over one million council dwellings since 1980 has reduced supplies even further. In 1987 a year's B&B bill in London for a homeless family was £11,315 whereas it cost

£7,400 to build a home to rent.

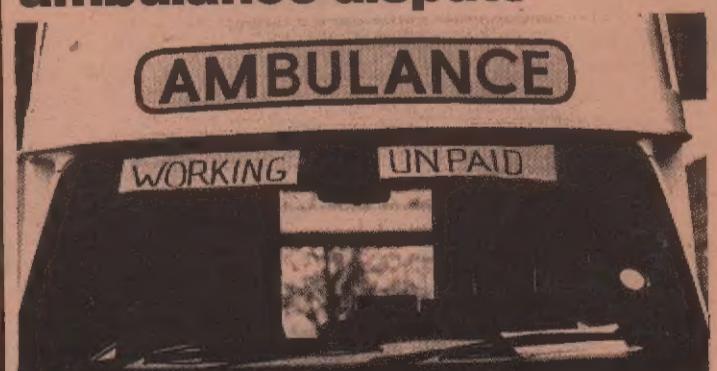
Everyone has the right to live in a decent home. Government policy is to waive that right in its continued attack on the welfare state. Recent Social Security changes directly contribute to youth homelessness. Under 18 year olds no longer qualify for Income Support unless they attend a Youth Training Scheme. Income Support paid to 18-24 year olds is only £27.90 a week. Although entitled to Housing Benefit it is almost impossible for a young person to run a house on such a tiny allowance.

Other Social Security changes also contribute to homelessness. Deposits for accommodation are no longer available, rent is paid in arrears and grants to cover the cost of furniture are not available. Small payments are made in the form of a loan. If you are too poor to repay the loan, you cannot receive the loan.

Thatcher's policy of 'care in the community', in reality 'care by the community', means that mentally and physically ill and disabled people are released from hospital often to find no resources available to help them. Households which take in elderly or sick relatives often buckle under the lack of outside support and families break up. An uncaring attitude to AIDS leads to many sufferers being evicted from the family home or rented accommodation to fend for themselves.

The effects of the last 11 years of Thatcher are literally being felt on our streets. ■

Shoddy deal ends ambulance dispute



AMBULANCE
WORKING
UNPAID
SUPPORT

AMBULANCE

ARBITRATION
NOW!

On 24 February Roger Poole emerged from talks with the government to announce a settlement to end the six-month-long ambulance dispute. Poole said the settlement rode 'a coach and horses through the government's pay policy', claiming that the deal was worth anything from 17.8 up to 24 per cent. The 17.8 per cent for over two years conceals the fact that ambulance workers will only receive a nine per cent increase up to 1 October and then 7.9 per cent in the six months up to April 1991. The

deal represents nine per cent over 18 months, exactly what the government offered in November 1989. An accident and emergency worker will earn just £34.17 more per week and for a day worker the increase is a miserable £24.87.

The deal agreed upon by Poole did not just end the dispute. It took the ambulance workers back to where they started: a pay rise of just nine per cent and without parity with the other emergency services.

Lorna Reid

Mass action against the Poll Tax

'Go to bed and pull the duvet over your head,' was the advice given by a backbench Tory MP to his distraught constituency workers as anti-Poll Tax protests swept across the country in March.

LORNA REID

But far from retiring to bed, Tory supporters, particularly in the English shires, were taking to the streets to protest against the high Poll Tax levels being set by Tory-controlled councils. Promised an average Poll Tax of £278 per head, the national average is actually £363 per head. For many Tory supporters the sugar mouse has turned into a bitter pill.

The Standard Spending Assessments (SSAs), the mechanism used by the Department of the Environment to calculate the spending needs of each local authority and district council, are extraordinarily low e.g. for the purposes of calculating spending needs the rate of inflation has been frozen at 3.8 per cent. On 28 February, 18 of West Oxfordshire District Council's ruling Tory group resigned in protest at their Poll Tax which has been set at £412 - £124 above the national average. Their resignations were the spark which lit the fire of Tory protest throughout the English shires. Thirty six out of 39 Shire county councils have set Poll Tax bills on average £70 per head above Whitehall targets.

The thousands of working class people who attended mass protest rallies outside their local Town Halls in inner city areas against implementation were branded as 'wreckers', 'looters' and 'outside agitators'. The vast majority of protests went ahead peacefully. Violence broke out where the police and local councils provoked it.

In Hackney, East London on 8 March, the police and council provoked an atmosphere of confrontation. The ruling Labour group had already expelled

three councillors for voting against spending tens of thousands of pounds on a Poll Tax collection centre. The town hall was turned into a bunker: windows were boarded up and security guards patrolled the building with dogs. Council workers had walked out earlier in the day in disgust at the measures taken by the council. For over an hour thousands of local people took part in a peaceful demonstration despite random snatches of people by the police. When a large section of the demonstration surged around the side of the Town Hall, thinking they could enter through a side door, the police attacked the demonstration. Bats drawn, they grabbed and punched anyone they could get their hands on - women children, pensioners.

In Lambeth, South London on 9 March, a peaceful demonstration of thousands of people decided to march to Downing Street. When they reached Brixton police station the police attacked. An eye-witness told *FRFI*, 'It seemed that the police chose the venue for the confrontation. Police in riot gear stopped the march and waded in. Streets were blocked off by police with dogs.'

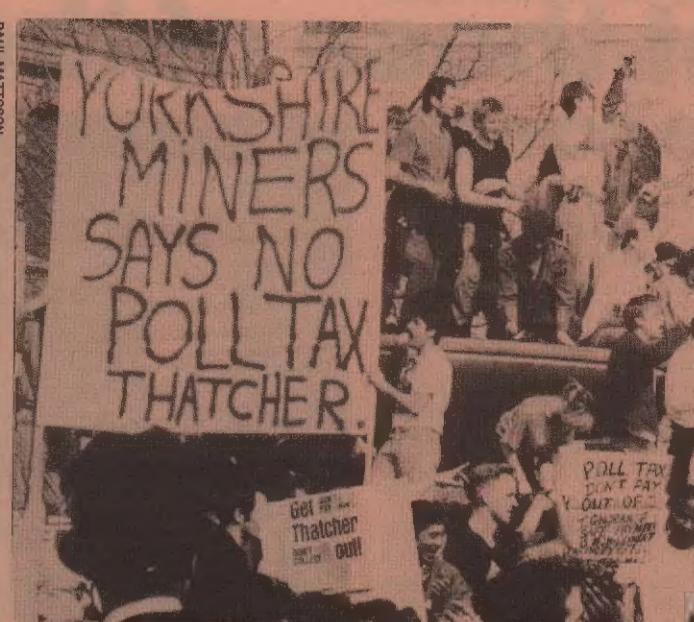
That Thatcher should attempt to discredit the demonstrations was predictable. That Kinnock should echo her was not surprising but nonetheless disgusting. Thatcher said the demonstrations were "... the negation of democracy. People should pursue their protest peacefully and in accordance with the democratic process.' Kinnock leapt up to reply, 'May I first of all agree with everything that the Prime Minister has just said as I have long made very clear.'

Try as they might, however,



the Tories and their allies in the Labour Party cannot divert the mass non-payment campaign through lies and slander. As the impact of the Poll Tax becomes clearer millions are pledging their support for non-payment. Only days after the mass protests outside the Town Halls, the transitional relief scheme was exposed as a fraud. Transitional relief is available from central government to local authorities to reduce Poll Tax levels, on condition that they keep to government spending levels. Out of 403 councils 306 are spending above government approved levels. Transitional relief will not be available for residents in areas run by these councils. It will also not be available to people living in property which does not have a separate rateable value. The government's claim that a two-adult household would only pay £3 more than their rates is a con. This is the latest lie on the Poll Tax to be exposed.

Shortly after it was confirmed that 42.5 per cent of adults in Glasgow are withholding payment of the Poll Tax, thus confirming the strength of the non-



Left: Demonstration outside Islington Town Hall 12 March. Above: The demand is clear in Trafalgar Square. Below: Riot police attacked all those who stood in their way in Trafalgar Square.



payment movement in Scotland, the Labour Party leadership proposed on 28 March to take disciplinary action against Labour Party members refusing to set Poll Tax charges and advocating non-collection in the run up to the local government elections. Still flush from success in the mid-Staffs by-election, Kinnock declared, 'We have been totally vindicated both in everything we said about the Poll Tax and in the way we

have led the national opposition to it.' Telling the poorest working class to pay a tax that they cannot afford is not, by any stretch of the imagination, a national campaign against the Poll Tax.

The fight against the Poll Tax has taken off around the country. Millions have pledged not to pay a penny. We must continue the fight and ensure, by placing centre stage the poor who simply cannot afford to pay, that our movement does not fall into the grip of the Labour Party, more concerned with its electoral success than the livelihoods of the poor. ■

High rates deliberate government policy

DAVID REED

The government makes great play on the supposed overspending of local councils especially if they are Labour controlled. It blames high rates on these councils. The facts, however, show something quite different. It is the government's own policies that have led to high rates. This was a conscious design in the lead up to the Poll Tax. Local government spending in England and Wales rose by only 15 per cent (in real terms) over the ten-year period 1979-80 to 1989-90. This was much less than the growth in national income (25 per cent) and smaller than previous standards. It is this which explains the appalling state of local services, the roads, sports and recreation facilities.

In spite of this, domestic rates rose by 83 per cent and non-domestic rates by 59 per cent. This rise was to fill the gap created by a fall of 18 per cent (in real terms) in central government grants to local authorities from 59 per cent to 42 per cent.

The government has deliberately shifted the burden of total taxation towards the rates. During the period of Thatcher governments, taxation as a proportion of GDP has in fact risen. However, while income tax has fallen, VAT has nearly doubled and rates have risen steeply - the extra burden on rates being equivalent to 3.5p of the 8p reduction in the basic rate of income tax over the period. (Information from *Fabian Society Pamphlet, Observer 4 March 1990*)

The fact is that this government is responsible for high rates and inadequate local authority services. It has been part of a deliberate policy in its transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. ■

Women picket Westminster

Three women from Greenwich, South London, held a week long picket outside the House of Commons to protest against the Poll Tax. Lorna Reid visited the picket and spoke to Chris Carter, Aileen Ryder and Janett Woods.

Why did you decide to hold the picket outside the House of Commons?

Aileen: We got fed up with attending meetings which just did a lot of talking and little action. We decided to channel our anger and frustration into action. We thought it would be best to hold here, outside the House of Commons, where the Poll Tax stems from.

Did you have any problems in organising and preparing the picket?

Aileen: Ten days before the picket was due to start Cannon Row Police said we couldn't hold our picket here (on a bit of land across the road from the Commons) and our application would have to be referred to the Department of the Environment.

The DOE said we could go ahead, but as this piece of grass is a Royal Park we would not be able to use it between the hours of 12 midnight and 6 am unless it was for the purposes of a national celebration. We suggested that the fact that people were prepared to picket for a week against the Poll Tax was a cause for a national celebration but they didn't accept that!

Janett: Carol Brickley, from City AA and *FRFI*, has given us a lot of help in our negotiations with the police. It was Carol who inspired us to go ahead with the picket and we are very grateful to her for all the help she has given us, she really got us on the right road.

What support have you received?

Aileen: We've been visited by Jeremy Corbyn, Dennis Skinner, Frank Hayes, Mildred Gordon, Max Madden, Lord Longford, Lord Hatch and Lord Taylor of Blackburn. We had lunch with Harry Barnes MP on Friday. We wrote to lots of MPs asking them to invite us into the House for lunch but only Harry Barnes did

so. Ken Livingstone said he was too busy going to functions for the abolition of ILEA! Tony Benn didn't reply but he stopped when he passed us on Tuesday and invited us in for a cup of tea. We told him we were too busy and he should phone us, we can receive calls on the public phone box next to our picket, and we'll arrange another time!

Chris: Roy Hattersley wouldn't even stop to speak to us when he went past.

Do you know if the Tories have responded to your picket?

Chris: Yes. Theresa Gorman, Tory MP, asked under Points of Order on Friday morning, 'Has Greenham Common come to Westminster?' We would like to thank Theresa because now we know we have been noticed. We also think the idea of bringing Greenham Common to Westminster is brilliant. If anyone wants to carry on the picket we would be pleased to help them.

Do you think the fact that you

are three women who have been the core of the picket has helped win you support?

Aileen: Yes. We think that it is becoming traditional for women to hold these types of demonstrations. Women are more inclined to get involved in action because they are going to be seriously affected under the several liability clause of the Poll Tax - women will have to go cap in hand to their hubbies to pay their Poll Tax.

What do you plan to do when the picket finishes?

Janett: We hope to meet more people who are interested in getting involved in action against the Poll Tax. After 11 years of people being screwed down with hardly any opposition, people are now beginning to realise that they can fight back. It's encouraging to see so many people say they won't pay the Poll Tax.

If people want to contact us to get involved in action or need help with activities they are holding we can be contacted on: Janett: 01-854 9581, Aileen: 01-690 2407, Chris: 01-854 1314. ■

Massive education cuts in Bradford

BILL BOLLOTEN

Bradford's Tory Council has imposed a series of vicious education cuts following the setting up of a Poll Tax of £276. Along with that other model Thatcherite local council, Westminster, this figure is actually below the government's own Poll Tax target.

Cuts of £2.3 million in education spending, plus further cuts of £5.6 million not announced in the official budget, will severely attack the education of children in the city. They will particularly hit working class and black children attending inner city and estate schools.

Families entitled to school uniform allowances and bus passes will have £104,000 snatched from them. £340,000 is to be stolen from the budgets of special schools and from children with special needs in main-

stream schools.

Members of Bradford NUT went on strike on 6 March in protest at these cuts - an action given only token support, if that, by the pro-Kinnock NUT leadership.

Worse is in store. Under the government's Local Management of Schools Scheme due to begin in April, schools will be required to control their own budgets. This is being used to disguise further, deeper cuts as these devolved budgets will not be sufficient to meet the needs of schools and their pupils. At least 230 teachers' jobs will be lost in Bradford. Repairs to buildings and furniture will not be carried out. The pupil/teacher ratio will inevitably rise - possibly to 34:1.

The Scheme will effectively ensure that School Governors and Headteachers will be making the Council's cuts for them. ■

The interests of the oppressed are not those of the oppressor

CAT WIENER

The release of Nelson Mandela on 11 February was greeted with euphoria as thousands turned out on the streets of South Africa's townships to celebrate. It has raised expectations of fundamental change amongst the black oppressed majority as well as amongst white South African business and its capitalist backers. Nelson Mandela has been perceived as playing a key role in uniting these conflicting interests and expectations.

It is rapidly becoming clear that no basis for such unity exists, and that the interests of the oppressed cannot be reconciled with those of the oppressor. On 26 March, South African police opened fire on a peaceful demonstration in Sebokeng township, killing at least 13 people and injuring hundreds more.

Popular anger in the townships has forced the ANC to pull out of pre-negotiation talks with the regime, scheduled for 11 April. Mandela stated that the 'action of the police against defenceless people created a situation the ANC could not tolerate'. FW de Klerk, who did not criticise the Sebokeng massacre, condemned the ANC for pulling out, and is pressing for the talks to go ahead. Whether or not they do will depend on which side is most able to exert pressure on Mandela and the ANC leadership.

The key political force in South Africa is the black working class which daily confronts the harsh reality of apartheid: the last two months have seen them out on the streets of South Africa demanding an end to poverty, unemployment and high rents. In March, over 100 'unrest' incidents were reported in 24 hours, with stones and petrol bombs being hurled at police stations and vehicles set alight. Over 300 prisoners on Robben Island embarked on a hunger

strike, which was called off by Mandela. With a nationwide strike against privatisation planned by COSATU and NACTU for early April, and even black police and prison services - the bulwark of the apartheid regime - in turmoil, the racist regime faces a crisis which threatens to be bigger than 1984-5. Its response has shown that under the gloss of de Klerk's reforms, nothing has changed: protests have been met with arrests, tear-gas and murder. Police reinforcements have been rushed to the townships. The lifting of the State of Emergency and the release of political prisoners - the minimum conditions set by the ANC for negotiations - seem unlikely in the current climate.

The ANC need to maintain the support of the masses if they are to represent a significant force at any future negotiations. Mandela, now Deputy President of the ANC, has approached those sections of the liberation movement, the PAC and AZAPO, who have been consistently voicing the demands of the black working class. Both AZAPO and the PAC have made it clear that they do not believe that a climate exists for negotiations. At a conference in Harare the PAC rejected negotiations in favour of a one-man-one-vote for a constituent assembly, and set up an internal wing to 'politically mobilise the African masses in liberating themselves'. The PAC does not believe that negotiations can take place from the position of weakness in which the black masses still find themselves. AZAPO stated that they believed that FW de Klerk's negotiation package will not be acceptable to black people.... The South African regime still retains political, military and economic power over the liberation forces. Hence the timing for negotiations is premature and therefore cannot deliver the expected revolutionary change.'



What all the liberation organisations agree on is the necessity of talking amongst themselves, especially in order to heal the bloody fighting between UDF/COSATU forces and Buthelezi's Inkatha movement in Natal, which has escalated over the recent period. Mandela has made considerable efforts to address the problem and draw Buthelezi into the peace process; but Buthelezi's response has been measured. He seems prepared for the bloodbath to continue as long as Inkatha gains the upper

hand and strengthens his position at the negotiating table.

The imperialists will concede as little as they can. The internal movement and the failing South African economy, exacerbated by sanctions, has pushed them this far. Mandela has called on the international movement to maintain its pressure. This was of crucial importance in exposing, in particular, Britain's role in supporting the apartheid regime. As Mandela voiced his support for sanctions and the armed struggle on the day of his release,

Thatcher was forced to hastily cancel a press conference. Although she has been prepared to go it alone and lift Britain's derisory sanctions on South Africa, she has been successfully debunked as the self-styled 'architect of change' for southern Africa: Hurd was snubbed by Mandela when he visited South Africa, and Mandela seems in no hurry to take up Thatcher's offer to visit her in Britain. Britain is unlikely now to be able to play the major role in any future negotiations.

The other imperialists are more subtle. They recognise that if capitalism is to remain intact in South Africa, they will have to win over a section of the black working class. The recent South African budget was designed with this in mind, re-allocating some government spending to black social services. They would like to see Mandela playing a key role in giving capitalism credibility amongst black people. His steadfast commitment to nationalisation has therefore come as something of a shock to them: Baker, Kinnock and leading South African businessmen are keen to persuade the ANC that such views are 'outmoded'.

What is clear is that capitalism in whatever form cannot begin to provide for the needs of the black masses. What they want is a transfer of economic power out of the hands of a minority into the hands of the majority. Gerrit Viljoen, South Africa's Constitutional Minister, has made it clear that black majority rule is not on the agenda. But the recent intensification of resistance and the regime's brutal response indicate that events may well prove otherwise. By releasing Nelson Mandela FW de Klerk hoped to find a man he could do business with. What he may well find instead is that Mandela's release has initiated the very revolutionary process that it was intended to stave off. ■

Crisis in the Homelands

LEIGH AVON

The artificial and criminal sectioning off of the so-called 'independent homelands' or bantustans has come into a serious state of crisis this month, with a military coup in Ciskei on 5 March and massive demonstrations in Bophutatswana.

The brutal regime of self-styled 'President for life' Lennox Sebe came to an end while he was in the Far East touting for trade, holding up non-unionised labour in Ciskei as an incentive. Brigadier Oupa Gqoza announced the formation of a four-man junta as a 'temporary measure' before return to civilian rule.

The popular hatred for Sebe was given expression by mass demonstrations of support for the coup, and for the South African liberation movements. Sebe had continued the ban on the ANC, PAC and AZAPO in Ciskei even after de Klerk had made his speech on 2 February.

By 6 March the demonstrations in Ciskei calling for an end to 'independence' and a return to South African rule had swollen to the extent that Gqoza turned to Pretoria for assistance. Government troops were duly sent in.

At Rankuwa township in Bophutatswana was the scene of similar demonstrations calling for the resignation of the puppet President Lucas Mangope and, again, a return to South Africa.

It was only after the death toll of demonstrators shot dead by the Bophutatswana police rose to 14 and the South African Army prepared to intervene that quiet returned to Ga Rankuwa and throughout Bophutatswana.

But how long will the shaky edifice of the homeland system stand up?



Celebrating outside South Africa House on Mandela's release

movements are unbanned, but the black majority are still landless, voteless, denied citizenship of the land of their birth - and Thatcher intends to visit de Klerk in a few weeks!

The AAM, regrettably, failed to mark the Sharpeville anniversary in any way.

We laid flowers on the gates of the embassy in memory of those shot dead thirty years ago and we returned for an emergency protest within less than a week for those gunned down in Sebokeng. We will never forget those

who have given their lives in the struggle against apartheid.

Richard Roques

The Namibian people chose 21 March as their day of independence in solidarity with the struggle of the black majority in South Africa. We celebrated Namibian independence with a picket outside the South African Embassy in the knowledge that there can be no real freedom for the Namibian people while Walvis Bay remains occupied by the racists and while the black majority of South Africa are not free.

Campaigning with City AA

The Gatting Reception Committee was formed by City of London Anti-Apartheid Group to oppose the scab cricket tour and all sporting links with South Africa.

Rose NI Loineachain

The first season of the rebel cricket tour was cut short because of the mass anger and resistance it met with in South Africa from the black majority. When the first four of them - manager Graveney, Emburey, Ellison and Barnett returned, we were there to meet them, with placards and chants denouncing the tour. 'No scab cricketers, no blood money'. Police and security men assaulted demonstrators, broke our banner and arrested three of us.

We organised a demonstration against Gatting after his return when he was invited to speak on the 'Wogan' show. As Gatting left, demonstrators warned him that we would return to hound him on every cricket pitch in England if he in-

tended to return to South Africa. The second rebel tour has now been cancelled, in the face of consistent opposition both in South Africa and here in Britain.

Over 100 people attended City of London Anti-Apartheid Group's Emergency General Meeting on 17 February to decide a programme of action for the coming period.

The three-hour discussion, in which everyone who wanted to speak was taken, centred around the most effective way of actively opposing British collaboration with apartheid, and ensuring that de Klerk and Thatcher are not able to fool people in this country that apartheid is at an end.

A motion put by City Group activists and supported and amended by the RCG proposed a picket of the racist South African embassy every weekend, to demand the release of

Thirtieth anniversary commemoration of the Sharpeville massacre

On 21 March 1990 the thirtieth anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre was commemorated at

Trial by British television

MAXINE WILLIAMS

Granada Television's *Who Bombed Birmingham?* has caused much controversy. Mrs Thatcher quickly said that it produced no new evidence and condemned 'trial by TV'. By which phrase she assuredly does not mean the programme's scandalous naming of four of the five Irish men it claims did the Birmingham bombings. No, Mrs Thatcher means the trial by TV of the police, judiciary and ministers involved in the frame-up and its concealment. It is they who have committed the crime of holding the Six in prison for 16 years knowing them to be innocent. The question is what is necessary to force them to release the Six and thereby admit this crime? Does *Who Bombed Birmingham?* help this process?

There have been some very useful TV documentaries on the case of the Birmingham Six. Useful in gathering together evidence of their innocence and presenting it to a wide public. *Who Bombed Birmingham?* is not, however, one of them. Instead, in line with the apparently limitless egoism of TV programme makers, they cast the journalists themselves and Labour MP Chris Mullin as the heroes of the piece. We see them 'finding' new evidence; tenaciously pursuing the truth and the real bombers. The widespread network of Irish and British people and organisations, which actually kept the case alive, does not figure. Instead our intrepid heroes do it all alone. So self-centred was the programme that when the Birmingham Six Appeal failed we were shown first the TV journalist expressing anguish.

OK, you might say, such people have their uses. Let them have their moment of glory, even if it is glory reflected off the real heroes and victims - the Six and their families. Rampant egomaniac, whilst not an edifying spectacle, does no great harm. But the programme does not stop there. The poison lies elsewhere. It quite unnecessarily named four of the five men said to have done the bombing. Three are freely living in Ireland and one is in jail. The fifth was not named for unexplained 'security reasons'. (Given their reckless disregard for the security of the four names, one might wonder whose security is being protected by not naming the fifth.)

Just as the press helped to imprison the Birmingham Six in 1974 so now Granada may be helping to imprison more Irish

people. It has certainly precluded any chance of even the semblance of a fair trial and has probably placed their lives in danger.

To name the men was acceptable, ruled the Independent Broadcasting Authority, because there was evidence that they had been involved in terrorism. Judge, jury and maybe hangman all in one! The IBA and Granada today apply the very same degraded principles to Irish people that were responsible for imprisoning the Birmingham Six in 1974. At the root of it, however disguised in tears for the plight of the Six, lies the usual British imperialist view that the Irish have no right to self determination and certainly no right to fight for it. If they do then no rules of justice apply to them. Anything goes - from in-

terment to frame-ups, from the Prevention of Terrorism Act to real 'trial by TV'.

By what right, by what perverted British logic do these TV programme makers think that the way to get the Six out of prison is to put another set of people in? The key point is that the Six are innocent and should be freed immediately. Only pressure, on all fronts, will get the Six released. That pressure is not helped by self-seeking journalists.

The Appeal of the Winchester Three is to be held in early April. They too were imprisoned without any evidence against them. Let us fervently hope that it does not take 16 or more years to free them. And that their liberty does not depend on people who do not support the Irish struggle and care more about TV ratings than justice. ■

BIRMINGHAM SIX

Drama for freedom

CHAS BURDEN AND RICHARD ROQUES

Sidewind: written by Ray Brennan. Performed by the Portrait Theatre Group at the Battersea Arts Centre, 7-18 March 1990.

Sidewind is the story of the wives and families of the Birmingham Six who are now in their sixteenth year of wrongful imprisonment. Ray Brennan tells the story of how the women struggle to keep their families together as they are forced into hiding amidst the anti-Irish hysteria of the times and how they built today's strong international movement calling for the release of the Birmingham Six

from absolutely nothing.

We see Gerry Hunter saying farewell to his wife, 'See you next week'. He has not been home since. As the news of the bombing of the pubs in Birmingham comes through and the raids and random arrests in the Irish community take place Sandra Hunter breathes a sigh of relief, 'I'm glad they're out of the way safe this weekend'.

In many modern plays women are cast on the margins of the dramatic narrative but in *Sidewind* Ray Brennan has focused particularly on the struggle of the women.

After seeing *Sidewind* it becomes clear that no Irish person can expect justice while Britain maintains its occupation of the

Six Counties of Ireland so it is a shame, in order presumably to gain liberal support for the cause of the Six, that anti-republican sentiments are expressed in the play. This is a betrayal of the very reasons that the six are in gaol in the first place. The imprisonment of these innocent men is a warning to all those who even show sympathy with the Republican movement.

In the final scene a convincing Lord Denning takes the stage to deliver his infamous 'appalling vista' speech. He concludes the play with, 'This is an attempt to overturn the conviction on a sidewind.'

Theatre at its best can be entertaining and at the same time contribute to the struggle against racism and for freedom. This play is a well-timed intervention in the fight to free the Birmingham Six. ■

BIRMINGHAM SIX

John Walker interviewed

Whilst participating in the Long Lartin prison forum on race relations in prison, FRFI comrades met John Walker and Hugh Callaghan, two of the Birmingham Six. John Walker told FRFI about the change in circumstances for the Six and commented on the speculation surrounding a new inquiry into their convictions.

'We have been told that new evidence has been put forward. We haven't been told what this evidence is and are still waiting for news of it. We think it's new evidence from a police officer or a screw who witnessed or knew about our treatment in police custody.'

'We used to be held as Category A prisoners but we are now Category B. Perhaps the authorities think we are less dangerous now. As Category A prisoners we were checked every hour at night and the screws made enough noise to wake us up. For the first four nights as a Category B, I didn't sleep waiting for the screw to come round. The press were told about our decategorisation before we were.'

'The government is trying to make us accept parole. We don't care about the government's games. We didn't break the law so we're not accepting parole. Anyway the government is talking rubbish. To get parole we

have to ask for it and we're definitely not asking for it. We will leave prison one way or clear. We're not giving in now after all these years. MPs say that if we're not the bombers then the

'The government is trying to make us accept parole. We don't care about the government's games. We didn't break the law so we're not accepting parole.'

real bombers must be found. They knew who the bombers were 15 years ago. They knew it wasn't us.'

'The government doesn't know what to do with us. We are an embarrassment. The investigation into our case covers more than one police force. It will cover the Morecambe and the West Midlands police. We are innocent men and the government knows that.'

John sent best wishes to *Fight Racism! Fight Imperialism!* FRFI readers should send cards and messages of support to John on his birthday on 15 April. John Walker 509494, HMP Long Lartin, Evesham, South Worcs WR11 5TZ. ■

British terror

PAM ROBINSON

Britain and its collaborators continue their reign of terror of the nationalist people in the six counties of Ireland.

● Monday 5 February The UDA/UFF flyposted loyalist areas of North and West Belfast with secret RUC files which they entitled *Collaborators Bulletin* compiled at 'H' Division in Bainbridge. They included photographs and details of men and one woman from Belfast and Co Down titled 'Believed involved in subversive activity'.

● East Belfast Kara Hill, the 14-year-old daughter of Paul Hill has been victimised at school where references to her father being a 'fenant bastard and an IRA bomber' had been made. The school social worker said they could not guarantee her safety if she was to return to school.

● Thursday 22 February In Ardoyne North Belfast, a loyalist gunman opened fire on a black taxi cab driver who received serious injuries when he was hit in the head, neck and twice in the chest.

● Monday 26 February An Army foot patrol opened fire at a car passing through a checkpoint they were manning without warning. They then chased and shot at the escaping driver hitting him in the neck.

● Sunday 4 and Monday 5 March Crumlin Road Prison Belfast Three attacks on republican prisoners have taken place since the Northern Ireland

Office legislation forcing the integration of loyalist and republican remand prisoners. In the first incident Sean Adams of Ballymurphy received two injuries to his neck and a cut under his eye when two loyalist prisoners attacked him with a knife. In the second incident two republican prisoners were beaten by loyalist prisoners. In a third incident two republican prisoners were scalded with boiling water thrown over them by loyalists.

● Wednesday 7 March Lurgan Loyalist gunmen shot and killed Sam Marshal only 100 yards from an RUC barracks he had just left. RUC batoned people who had heard the shooting. Marshal had bail conditions which included him signing on at the RUC barracks every Wednesday and Saturday. It is believed this was known by his killers.

● Saturday 10 March Ardoyne North Belfast A private taxi driver received gunshot wounds in his shoulder from two loyalist gunmen one of whom had called the taxi company. The taxi driver had become suspicious while he was waiting for his pick-up. On seeing the gunmen he fled the scene when he was fired upon.

● Sunday 11 March Kashmir Road West Belfast Eamon Quinn was shot dead by a loyalist gunman outside his home at 10.45am. The gunman was accompanied by three others in a stolen car. Quinn was shot at point-blank range in the head and with another three rounds in his body. ■

Extradition - British 'justice' exposed

SARAH RICCA

On Tuesday 13 March, in a decision which was said to send Thatcher 'hopping mad', the Supreme Court in Dublin refused to extradite to the North two IRA volunteers and Maze escapees, Dermot Finucane and Jim Clarke.

The five Supreme Court judges unanimously opposed the extradition following revelations of brutality against prisoners in the aftermath of the mass break-out from the Maze in 1983, during which Finucane and Clarke escaped. For years prisoners' allegations of brutality had met with strenuous denials from prison warders. But the conspiracy was finally broken when in one of the cases the court ruled that the warders had lied and that the attacks had taken place. It emerged that, following the break-out, remaining prisoners were moved from one block to another, and on their way were forced to pass between two lines of warders armed with batons and dogs. The court awarded £3000 compensation. Prisoners received a total of £35,000 in out-of-court settlements this year, seven years after the assaults took place.

Despite these revelations, no action whatsoever has been taken



Jim Clarke (left) with friends after his release

fended by it - in a stroke removing virtually all constitutional rights from Irish nationalists.

The decision of the three judges has revoked most of that. Speaking on their behalf, Judge Walsh said that 'political exemption is still the law of this state - it has not been repealed', and that any other rulings were only additions to that law.

Unionists and backbench Conservatives responded to the ruling with outraged demands that the Anglo-Irish Agreement and the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism be scrapped, attacking Northern Ireland Secretary Peter Brooke for not being more vehement in his criticism. But Brooke, concerned to calm the already stormy seas of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, gritted his teeth and suggested only that the decision

was 'disturbing and difficult to understand'. The decision clearly came as a shock to the Dublin government (when they claim the Irish courts are independent, they don't mean that independent), whose security forces had sealed off border roads in preparation for the two Republicans' return to the North. They at once reassured their paymasters in Whitehall that the decision would not set a precedent for other cases.

Whether Dublin is right on the question of precedents will be tested in the forthcoming appeal against extradition by former Sinn Fein MP, Owen Carron. Meanwhile the Anti-Extradition Committee has pledged to keep up its campaign to defend all Irish Republicans under threat of extradition to British jails. ■

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM! APRIL/MAY 1990 • 5

'Now we are stronger than ever'

The US and El Salvador governments are hoping that the defeat of the Sandinistas in the Nicaraguan elections will help them isolate and defeat the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador. TREVOR RAYNE spoke to the FMLN's VICTOR AMAYO for their response.

Since we last spoke (see *FRFI* 92) we have witnessed the invasion of Panama and the Nicaraguan elections. Will these have a bearing on the FMLN's struggle?

In the military sphere, no. The FMLN has never depended on the Nicaraguans for arms. However, on the political side, yes. The ARENA government feels confident: they think the situation is now in their favour and they are putting delays in the way of negotiations because they feel they have the full support of the North Americans. The other way in which the Nicaraguan elections affect not just the FMLN but the left throughout Latin America and in general is in a positive way. It shows that the first political party that brought genuine democracy to Central America is precisely the Sandinistas. This gives us the moral authority to say that the left in Latin America wants real democracy.

Do you have an explanation of why the Sandinistas lost the elections?

You know that they are now undertaking a self-criticism. They realise that they began to suffer the effects of the North American embargo. The economic plight was so severe that people were voting with their stomachs to try and stop the war. The astonishing thing is not that the San-

dinistas have lost, but that they still have 41 per cent of the population.

The Sandinistas also began to realise that they were doing poor mass organisation work. The reason was the war. They needed their political cadres to lead the war instead of organising the people in the cities.

What is the situation now in El Salvador and the terms for negotiations?

After the November offensive the ARENA government imposed a state of emergency and passed a fascist law, the anti-terrorist law, which is so wide that anything is forbidden. This created a situation in which ARENA are isolated from all other social and political forces. These parties realised that the state of emergency was against them, not the FMLN, because we have been outside the law all along. Now we are stronger than ever: after the offensive we have been able to organise logistics in the cities, to bring the war to the cities. Now we are calling on the United Nations to participate in finding a solution to the crisis in El Salvador. After the offensive the ARENA government is in such deep economic and political crisis that you cannot find a parallel in the previous history of our country.

What are your preconditions for negotiations?

Now we are launching a diplomatic offensive. The ARENA government's position is to have the UN only as a witness to negotiations, but we and the other political parties call for a more active role for the General Secretariat as a mediator. ARENA and the military do not want that because it would mean recognising that a solution can only be reached with the FMLN/FDR as the leading political force.

Since the murder of Hector O'Queli the FMLN has decided not to allow the ARENA government to present a face of negotiating while at the same time killing people. So to create an environment for negotiations we accepted the 15 December UN General Assembly declaration that there is be a political solution, the killing of civilians be stopped, bombing and the use of heavy weapons in populated areas be stopped and so on. We also demand that the government purge the army. They are responsible for killing 72,000 people in El Salvador in the last ten years. They must also reduce the army's size and restructure it, and modify the judicial system because it is vicious, corrupt and in the hands of the ARENA. We also put as a condition that they make some changes in the electoral process: about 45 per cent of the potential voters are excluded because of legal barriers to registration. A further condition is the punishment of the killers of the six Jesuit priests and Archbishop Romero, the organisers

of the death squads and the killers of Hector O'Queli.

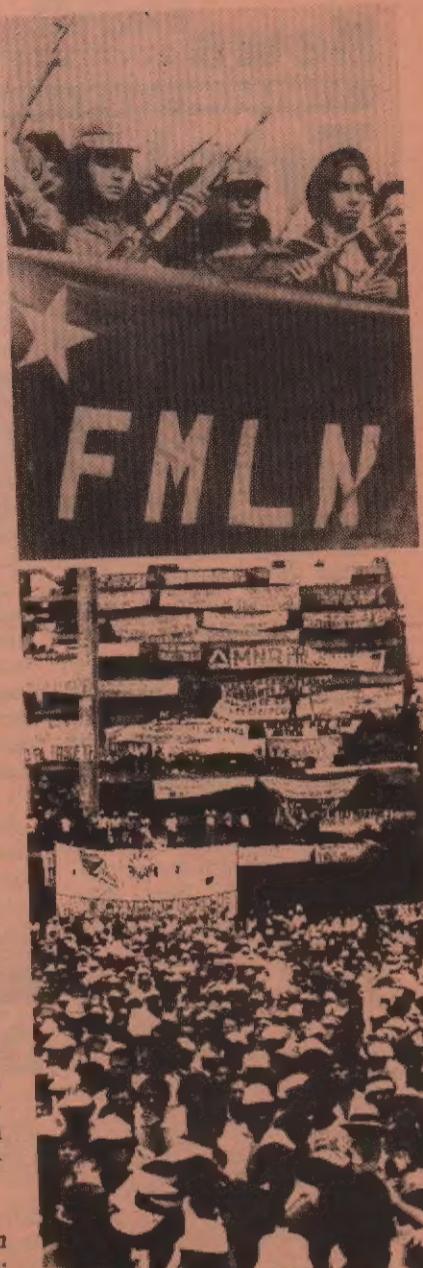
Is the changed situation in Central America changing the political complexion of the FMLN and its aims?

You not only have to consider what is happening in Central America but in Eastern Europe as well. It is absolutely clear to the FMLN that something is wrong in Eastern Europe. This is not just a theoretical problem for us but a practical one because we have to forecast the kind of society we are trying to build. It has affected the FMLN and now we are holding an internal debate to consider, for instance, what pluralism means, what a single party means, the dictatorship of the proletariat, etc. We have to debate these issues and at the same time conduct armed struggle.

In the recent period the USA has intensified its threats against Cuba and has now opened up TV Marti.

Not only that, you have to remember the US attack on the Cuban ship *Hermano* in January. They are trying to overthrow the Cuban government and they are preparing a mercenary force in Miami just to be ready. They think it will be a situation like Eastern Europe, but they do not take into account that the nature of the Cuban revolution is different, absolutely different. ■

Readers wishing to make a donation to the FMLN should send it to: ELSAC, 20 Compton Terrace, London N1 2UN making it clear that the money is for the FMLN.



The popular movement, despite heavy repression, continues to organise in the trade unions and universities.

NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS

White House aggression wins

On 25 February, Nicaraguans went to the polls for only the second time ever, and voted for a respite from nine years of US aggression that has killed and maimed tens of thousands, that has destroyed the country's economy. In a turnout of 86%, opposition presidential candidate Violeta Chamorro of the US-backed coalition UNO, won 55% of the vote as against the 41% for Daniel Ortega of the FSLN. In the 92 seat National Assembly the 14 parties that make up the UNO (United National Opposition) have 51 seats, the FSLN have 39 and the MUR (Revolutionary Unity Movement) and Yatama/PSC (Social Christian Party) have one seat each. CHARLES BOLTON, who has lived in Nicaragua, comments.

The result was a shock; opinion polls had predicted another clear victory for the Sandinistas and the Bush administration had been laying the groundwork for discrediting the elections. On television early the next day Daniel Ortega pledged the FSLN to respect the electoral process as a necessary step to bring a measure of peace and stability to the Nicaraguan people.

There was little or no sign of any celebration of the UNO victory. It was the Sandinista supporters who came out to reaffirm their commitment to the revolution that worked for freedom, independence and social justice.

So, what happened? The vote was hardly for the policies of the UNO coalition - a rag-bag of conservatives, liberals, ex-contras and the badly named communist and socialist parties, united only by their antipathy to the Sandinistas and their desire for US dollars.

What the UNO did promise was the end to compulsory military service and the hope of economic improvement. Ending military service was an easy thing to offer, as it was their allies, the US administration and the contras, waging war against Nicaragua that had made military service necessary. Similarly with the economy, UNO's policy was based on

Bush's promise to lift the economic blockade and send aid in the event of a UNO victory. Noam Chomsky commented 'In essence the US has said to the Nicaraguan people: "Vote for our candidate - Chamorro - or let your children starve."'



THE GOVERNMENT CHANGES - THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES

The election result is a major setback for the FSLN, but their revolutionary project is far from over. The FSLN is the largest and best organised party in the country. In the National Assembly they are the largest single party, with 39 seats. None of the parties in the UNO coalition has more than 5 seats, and together they do not have

the majority necessary to change or repeal the constitution. The constitution, introduced in 1986, guarantees many of the achievements of the revolution: agrarian reform, access to health and education, nationalisation of various sectors of the economy, the character of the army, the freedom to organise in Trade Unions and mass organisations, and the autonomy project. Outside the administration, through the trades union, workers' and peasants' cooperatives, women's organisations, the Sandinistas plan to 'govern from below.'

FRANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

What happens now depends more than anything on what happens to the 10,000 or so contras based in Honduras but still carrying out attacks in the sparsely populated North of Nicaragua. Publicly the UNO have called for them to demobilise. Chamorro has even agreed with Ortega's statements that the Sandinistas will not hand over control of the EPS (Sandinista Popular Army) until the contras are disarmed.

On 23 March Chamorro's adviser (and son-in-law) Antonio Lacayo announced an agreement with contra leader Oscar Sovalbano for an immediate ceasefire and the dismantling of contra camps in Honduras. But already this agreement is looking shaky. Sovalbano may have been happy with his promised share of the dollar handouts, but other contra leaders are holding out for their blood money. Contra attacks have continued before and since the elections. On the same day as the agreement was announced, a truck near Jinotega, killing 12 soldiers and a local woman. And it is now (28 March) reported that many of

the contras have left the Honduran camps for Nicaragua.

The contra killers were created, trained, armed and supplied by the US and without continued US backing cannot survive. Whether the US/UNO want to keep some contra presence 'in reserve' or whether they are seen as too uncontrollable and, as such, a liability is yet to be seen.

With the contra disarmed and resettled, the UNO could seek to gradually replace Sandinistas, restructure and privatise state institutions, build up alternative 'bosses' unions, and hope for economic improvement, with US aid money, to happen fast enough to keep their fragile coalition together. In Washington, Bush has asked for \$300m emergency aid for Nicaragua, but Congress has so far been reluctant to allocate this from the military budget.

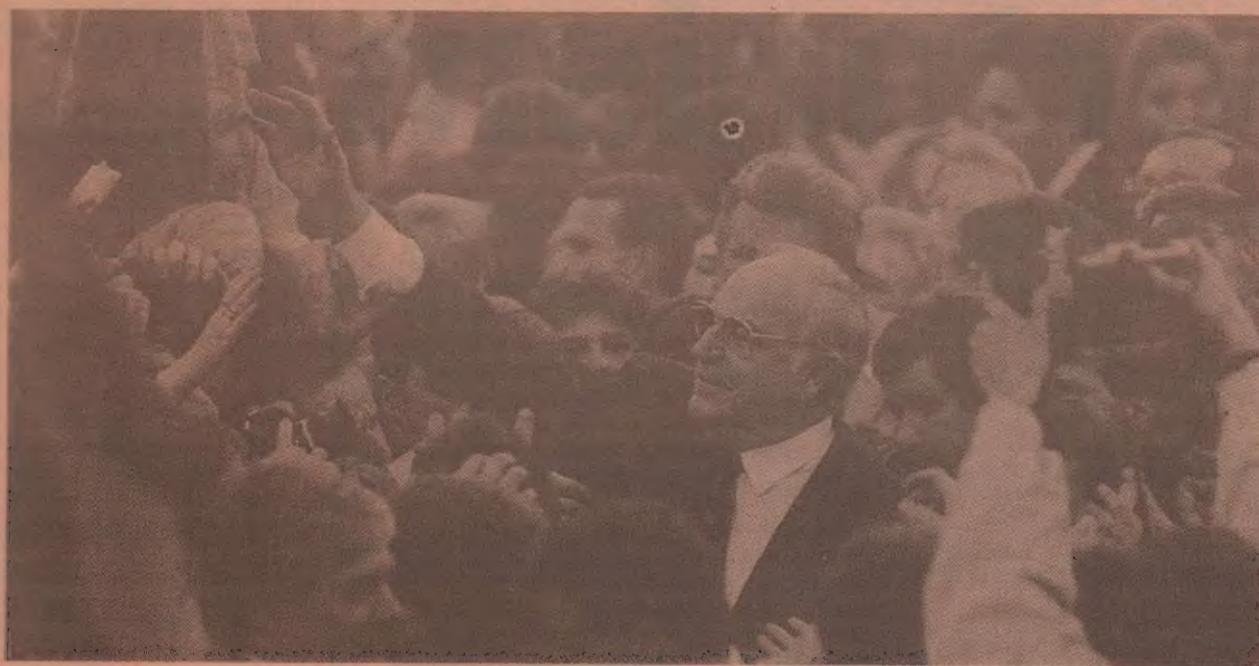
In Managua, after several weeks of discussions, the FSLN and UNO have agreed a 'procedural protocol' for 'the transfer of control of the EPS and Sandinista police.' Details are incomplete as we go to press but the accord envisages a smaller 'depoliticised' army and police, says contra demobilisation is an 'essential element for the transfer of power, and pledges to respect certain achievements of the revolution, including the transfer of confiscated (ex-Somocista) land and homes to thousands of campesinos.'

Meanwhile the FSLN are not giving up the initiative. They intend to continue to argue for the revolutionary process and organise to defend the gains of the last ten years. The high level of support for the FSLN - in spite of the gross US interference - shows that the Sandinista revolution is far from over, and neither should be the support of solidarity activists in Britain. ■



Gains of the Revolution: Since 1979 over 1,400 new primary schools have been built; free medical care is available throughout the country; peasant farmers have received land titles in 60

No to German reunification



Helmut Kohl in Erfurt

The victory of the right-wing Alliance for Germany (AFG) in the German Democratic Republic's (GDR) general election on 18 March signals the beginning of the final chapter of the German socialist state. Ever since the political crisis began in September 1989 with the mass exodus to West Germany, the German communists of the Socialist Unity Party (SED, now renamed as the Party of Democratic Socialism - PDS) has been waging a rearguard battle against the imperialist unification of Germany which will destroy all the gains the working class won in the GDR.

DALE EVANS reports on what has happened.

The Alliance for Germany (AFG) won 48 per cent of the popular vote, and became the largest single block in the GDR parliament. Large sections of the East German working class voted for the right in order to speed up the process of reunification, and quickly gain the benefits of German imperialist economic power and success. The AFG in fact did particularly well in the south where since September 1989 most of the mass demonstrations against the socialist state took place. These areas are also the most industrialised in the GDR.

However, contrary to the statements of bourgeois political commentators the PDS was not wiped out in the south and gained a respectable 15 per cent of the vote in Dresden (the same as the West German sponsored Social Democrats), and 14 per cent in Leipzig. In the north the PDS did much better gaining 23 per cent in the northern region of Rostock and 30 per cent in Berlin, where the AFG won only 27 per cent of the vote. Berlin, known as Red Berlin in the 20s and 30s, and where thousands of workers and communists were imprisoned or killed by the Nazis, is still prepared to fight for a progressive future.

Despite all predictions, the PDS in

the GDR has not collapsed. Membership of the old SED stood at 2,300,000; membership of the new PDS stands at 600,000. Unlike Hungary, where communism has totally collapsed, or Poland, where the Communist Party has dissolved, the PDS has stood its ground and can have an important role to play in a reunified Germany, defending the interests of the working class and oppressed as a party to the left of the Social Democratic Party (SPD).

In true imperialist style the GDR elections were run and grossly interfered with by the West Germans. With the exodus of many skilled workers, including doctors and nurses, and the refusal of the West German government to give the GDR a loan before the elections, the GDR government had to bring the elections forward from May to March. Hans Modrow, the GDR prime minister, commented:

'I welcome the promise of large-scale aid after the election on 18 March, but in the meantime I cannot help agreeing with the view that Bonn wants first to bring us to our knees.'

Chancellor Helmut Kohl toured the GDR, speaking for the AFG, and promising the East Germans manna on reunification. East Germans would not lose their social benefits; Deutschmarks and Ostmarks (the GDR currency) would be exchanged at a rate of one to one; one nation one state etc etc. Very little was said about the losses; in a working population of nine million, nearly three million could be unemployed; after reunification it will take at least five years for East German wage levels to reach 70 per cent of West German wage levels; at the same time subsidies will be withdrawn, making East German prices the same as West German in a very short space of time. Also this massive reserve of new labour will increase competition in the labour market keeping down wages in West Germany. Kohl also used the GDR election to win support for his own party, the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), for the West German general election later this year, raising the Polish border issue to gain votes from the German fascist-right.

THE SOVIET UNION AND THE END OF GERMAN SOCIALISM

Against the West's preoccupation

that Germany remain in NATO, the Soviet Union has argued for a neutral Germany. This position was consistently argued for from the end of World War II to the establishment of two separate German states in 1949 (see *FRFI* 92, January 1990). However, given the political weakness of the Soviet Union in international politics, and its withdrawal of political and military support from eastern European communists, the GDR will inevitably be integrated into NATO and eventually the EC. A reunified Germany will increasingly become more menacing as it fights to realise its ambition of dominating the whole of eastern Europe. It will become the major imperialist threat to other West European imperialist powers.

By not opposing this reunification, and arguing that it is part of the process of building a 'common European home' Gorbachev hopes in return to receive favours such as increased trade, capital investment and scientific and cultural links.

IMPERIALIST RIVALRY - THATCHER VERSUS KOHL

West Germany had a trade surplus of 148 billion DM in 1989, second only to Japan. The economic strength of a united Germany could mean that it will overtake Japan. This represents a major threat to British imperialism, whose invisible earnings ran into the red for the first time since the Napoleonic wars. With West Germany's large industrial base and its ever-increasing export of capital, by the end of the century it will un-

doubtedly become the centre of European finance. The immediate effects of German unification will also threaten Britain. German interest rates will rise to raise capital for investment in eastern Germany. This could lead to higher interest rates in Britain to stem the tide of capital outflow. The Thatcher boom based on property and financial speculation means that British capitalism is no match for German capitalism in Eastern Europe. For Thatcher, German reunification can only increase the pressure on the bubble to burst!

ANTHEMPERIALISM AND THE GERMAN QUESTION

Anti-imperialists oppose German reunification on the simple basis that it has been achieved mainly by imperialist pressure and will prove to be against the interests of the working class throughout Germany, Eastern Europe and the oppressed nations. The overthrow of socialist relations of production and the imposition of capitalist relations of production are not in the long-term interests of the working class. Let us remind the Trotskyists and Labourites in the future, when the skilled workers of eastern Europe receive high wages because of the super-exploitation of other workers; or when Turks, Yugoslavs, Mozambicans are murdered in racist attacks or are driven out; when Jewish graves are desecrated; when pan-Germanism destabilises Czechoslovakia and Poland, that they argued for 'self-determination' and welcomed the destruction of a socialist state in 1989-90. ■

The Polish border question

Between 1945-49 approximately 12 million Germans were removed from many areas of what is now Poland: its western territories, East Prussia and Danzig (Gdansk). The border between Poland and Germany was drawn along the rivers Oder and Neisse. Kohl would not guarantee this border unless the Polish government abandoned all claims to war reparations against any future united German state, and secondly give constitutional guarantees to the rights of the German minority still living in Poland. Under pressure from his own foreign minister, the USA, USSR and the EEC, Kohl finally dropped these demands on 6 March.

For the fascist Republicans the 'German question is completely open.' In West Germany an exile organisation which seeks pan-Germanism, that is the return of all former German-speaking areas to

the German state, has a membership of two million. In February 1990 at a by-election in Opole in a German area of Poland a German nationalist won attaining 39.3 per cent of the vote against the Solidarity candidate with only 35.6 per cent. On a recent visit to the German areas of Poland Kohl was greeted with banners proclaiming 'Kohl is our Chancellor too.'

On the other side of the coin of such German chauvinism is racism. With a new massive pool of labour available to the West German capitalists pressure will increase to remove the *Gastarbeiter*, mainly Turks and southern Europeans. In the GDR 200,000 Poles, Vietnamese, Mozambicans and Cubans work on a contract basis to alleviate the GDR shortage of labour. In recent years racism has increased in the GDR with attacks on these workers.

Lithuanian nationalism threatens Soviet Union

The crisis which is destroying the foundations of socialism and the very unity of the Soviet Union has been brought to the centre of the political stage by the clash between the central government and Lithuania's nationalist forces demanding independence. EDDIE ABRAHAMS and BOB SHEPHERD report.

As a result of Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost, and the collapse of the CP USSR's standing among the masses, competing nationalist bourgeois forces have seized the political initiative and have commenced an all out struggle to secure privileges for themselves at the expense of other national groups and states.

The triumph of reactionary nationalism was demonstrated in the recent local council and Republican parliamentary elections. Anti-socialist forces seized control not only in the Baltic states - Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia - but also in the Ukraine where the nationalist Rukh won over 50 per cent of the seats of the Kiev city Soviet. In Georgia the Supreme Soviet has followed the lead of Lithuania and said it wants talks with

LITHUANIA

The clash between the central government and the nationalist movements which resulted in military intervention in Azerbaijan has now surfaced sharply in Lithuania.

Following the elections, the Sajudis-dominated parliament declared Lithuania's 'independence' from the Soviet Union. They have, with the support of the Lithuanian Communist Party which has split from the CPSU, changed the name of the re-

public from the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic to the Republic of Lithuania, and declared 'the re-establishment of the sovereign rights of the Lithuanian state trampled upon by a foreign power in 1940'. The anti-communist character of the Sajudis is revealed by the fact that two of its deputies were active in anti-Soviet underground movements which had collaborated with the Nazis during the Second World War.

The aspiring Lithuanian bourgeoisie hopes to privatise the Lithuanian economy and use the vast economic base developed during the period of Soviet power to cut themselves a position in the West European capitalist market. The lie peddled by the nationalists that Lithuania has not progressed inside the Soviet Union is propaganda

designed to dupe the Lithuanian working class which will suffer the consequences of this reactionary programme. In 1940 74 per cent of Lithuanians worked on the land and only seven per cent in industry. Since then with over 50 billion roubles investment, industrial output has grown by 84 times the 1940 level. Lithuania relies on the rest of the Soviet Union for fuel and raw material; it receives these imported goods at prices up to two thirds below world market prices.

PRESIDENT GORBACHEV INTERVENES

Directed by President Gorbachev the central government has taken a number of measures to prevent its total loss of control over Lithuania. However it has to be stated bluntly that Gorbachev's intervention, designed to keep Lithuania within the ambit of the Soviet Union, has not been motivated by the desire to defend the unity of a socialist state.

Since he was elected the country's first Executive President Gorbachev has revealed his real class standpoint. He has chosen to side with the aspiring Russian bourgeois and petit-bourgeois elements who wish to subordinate other states to their own interests. This was made perfectly evi-

dent in his election speech which emphasised his determination to introduce a fully fledged market and price reform, create a commodity and then a stock market and to substantially cut spending.

Gorbachev's election has freed him from all possible Communist Party or working class restraints or discipline. Included in his new powers will be the right to dismiss government officials, and the right to impose a state of emergency or martial law in any region or republic in the USSR. This concentration of power in the hands of Gorbachev is the means by which the aspiring Russian privileged strata will try to defend their own position against challenges from other nationalities.

Whether these reactionary forces will succeed in carrying through their programmes which will destroy all the gains of the world's first successful socialist revolution remains to be seen. However socialists have, alas, no reason to be optimistic in the short term. The working class in the USSR has been devastatingly weakened and split along nationalist and reactionary lines and will require a new political leadership to go forward. This will be a long and difficult task. ■

NEW TIMES

old opportunism

✓ tick your preference communism
marxism after marx post feminism
personal is political dictatorship of the
proletariat new politics vanguard
post-modernism glasnost active
citizenship lenin peace war
hunger environment capitalism

'New Times is a fraud, a counterfeit, a humbug. It palms off Thatcherite values as socialist, shores up the Thatcherite market with the pretended politics of choice, fits out the Thatcherite individual with progressive consumerism, makes consumption itself the stuff of politics. New Times is a mirror image of Thatcherism passing for socialism. New Times is Thatcherism in drag.'

With such a forthright start, Sivanandan's critique of the CPGB's concept of New Times can hardly fail to be of interest. And indeed, there is much in it that communists would agree with, for amongst some rather convoluted prose there are many substantial points. But ROBERT CLOUGH argues that there is also a feeling of conclusions not drawn, of arguments not followed through, which reduces the whole.

Sivanandan starts his critique by tracing the origins of New Times to the split between the Eurocommunist wing of the CPGB, grouped around *Marxism Today*, and the 'old guard', who left with the *Morning Star*. The former had already rejected revolution and class war; now they had to 'rethink' Marxism. Their new ideology had

... provided theoretical confirmation that economic determinism and class reductionism were non-Marxist and things of the past. The economic base did not determine, even "in the last instance", the ideological and political superstructure. They were all more or less "autonomous instances", "articulating" with each other, influencing and being influenced, in all sorts of "conjunctures".

(Sivanandan, p3)

Politics was now a matter of 'positioning in and through and vis-à-vis these conjunctures'. Their precise expression at any time depended on the nature of the 'conjuncture', for as Sivanandan says, there is a great advantage in their notion of autonomy: 'it allows you to be ad-hoc, opportune, open ended, pluralist. The only thing you have to be sure of is your own identity.' (p3-4)

THE ECONOMY OF THE NEW TIMES
What then are the features of these New Times? Stuart Hall summarises the economic ones as follows: a shift to new information technologies from the chemical and electronic-based technologies; a shift towards more flexible, specialised and decentralised forms of working, with, as a consequence, a decline of the old manufacturing base; the hiving off or contracting out of functions and services; a leading role for consumption, reflected in an emphasis on choice and product differentiation, on marketing and packaging, on targeting the consumer according to lifestyle and culture rather than by social class; a decline in the proportion of skilled, manual, male working class, with the rise of service and white-collar working class; more flexi-time and

part-time working coupled with a growing 'feminisation' and 'ethnicisation' (Hall's terms) of the workforce; an economy dominated by the multinationals; the 'globalisation' of the new financial markets; lastly, the emergence of new patterns of social divisions - between public and private sector, between the two-thirds 'haves' and the one-third 'have nots', for instance. (Hall and Jacques, p118)

There is also a 'cultural' aspect to New Times: according to Hall, the 'individual subject has become more important as collective social subjects - like that of class or nation or ethnic group - have become more segmented and "pluralised"' (p119). Other aspects itemised by Sivanandan from the same article are the emergence of new identities associated with greater work flexibility and the maximisation of individual choices through personal consumption.

'... an eat
drink and
be merry
socialism,
because
tomorrow
we can eat,
drink and
be merry
again'

It is a list of features, as Sivanandan points out, without any causal interconnection. For the New Timers, they may be associated, but the one does not necessarily influence, let alone determine the other. Hall certainly does not want to find the connections; indeed, that is against his method, for as he points out:

'Classical Marxism depended on an assumed correspondence between "the economic" and "the political": one could read off political attitudes and objective social interests and motivations from economic class positions.' (p121)

And this is precisely what New Timers have rejected.

Sivanandan does not attempt to deny some of the obvious features that Hall points out; after all, the working class has significantly changed in composition. Just to take a

few figures: manufacturing employment was 9 million in 1964, 5 million in 1987. Although the numbers in banking and insurance have been steadily rising, Thatcherism has made it a particularly rapid process - 1.8 million in 1982 to 2.3 million in 1987, while female part-time employment rose from 2.8 to 5.2 million between 1971 and 1989. We addressed and explained these secular changes some 15 years ago (*Revolutionary Communist* 3/4 and 5, both anathema to New Timers, since they were directed against their earlier positions).

**'As this stratum is
also happily
blessed with
wedges of
discretionary
income, their
personal lifestyles
and consumption
become not just an
affordable option
but a positive
obsession.'**

IMPERIALISM AND NEW TIMES

What we did not see then was that the decline of the manufacturing working class is in essence its export: that the export of capital to the oppressed nations has created the many million Korean, South African and Brazilian workers. But these are beyond the concern of New Timers; as Sivanandan says of Hall, in his refusal to be 'deterministic', he

'... leaves out of his reckoning the massed up workers of the Third World, on whose greater immiseration and exploitation the brave new western world of Post-Fordism is being erected.' (p16)

However, this is not surprising, for New Times is a theory about, and justification of privilege, and of privilege which is inseparable from imperialism. It is noteworthy that Hall and Jacques, in their introduction to their volume on New Times say that 'the global character of New Times should not disguise the fact that the focus of its dynamic lies in the West'. They then go on:

'One of the major weaknesses of the "New Times" analysis so far is that it has failed to assess what New Times means for those countries and peoples outside the perimeter

of the West... New Times could easily be the signal for yet another cycle of Western domination, economically and socially, rather than the beginnings of a new kind of settlement between the overdeveloped and the underdeveloped parts of the world.' (p19)

NEW TIMES AND THE END OF THE WORKING CLASS

Imperialism as economic oppression and exploitation is reduced to an anodyne notion of domination, immiseration to the equally banal concept of underdevelopment. The New Timers believe that capital has finally freed itself from labour, that what Marx regarded as a continuous process has reached its accomplishment. The political significance of this is obvious: if capital no longer depends on labour, then the working class is no longer the leading agent of social transformation. Hence we arrive at a complete inversion of reality: for communists, the dynamic of 'New Times' is not in the west at all, but in those countries where the working class not only numbers many millions, but where it is forced daily to head the struggle for the destruction of imperialism.

The New Timers, having dismissed the working class, have had to search for the social forces they wish to lead to rebuild British politics in their image. These forces, they believe, are in the black, feminist, gay, green and peace movements. However, as Sivanandan says, there is a double-edge. On the one hand:

'What is so profoundly socialist about these new social forces is that they raise issues about the quality of life... which the working class movement has not just lost sight of but turned its face against.' (p10)

On the other:

'... if these issues are fought in terms of the specific, particularist oppressions of women qua women, blacks qua blacks and so on, without being opened out to and informed by other oppressions, they lose their claim to that universality which was their particular contribution to socialism in the first place.'

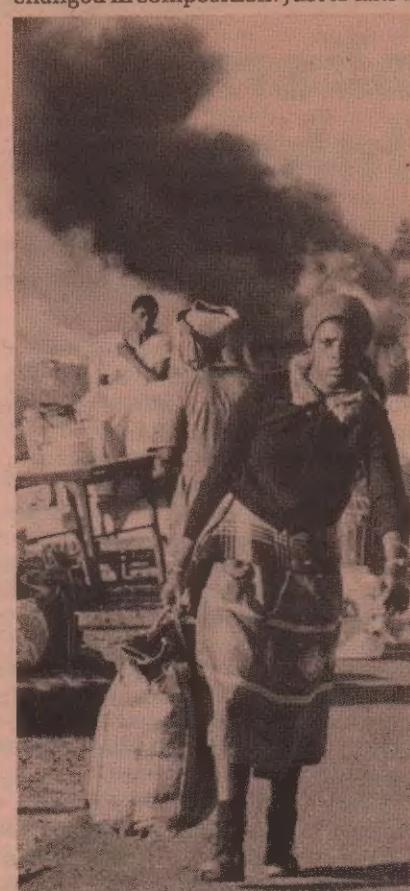
NEW TIMES AND THE BODY POLITIC

And as Sivanandan also points out, it is not the potential universality of these issues that interests the New Timers. Instead, it is their ability to act as a medium for expressing one's individual identity that makes them so attractive. For if we have abolished classes, our former social identity has also disappeared, and we have to find a replacement. And this can only be a personal one, defined by one's physical characteristics or individual inclinations. 'Personal life from consumption to sexuality has been increasingly politicised', the *Manifesto for New Times* declares (Hall and Jacques, p449). Or as Stuart Hall says in his more verbose and pretentious manner:

'Far from there being no resistance to the system, there has been a proliferation of new points of antagonism, new social movements of resistance organised around them - and, consequently, a generalisation of "politics" to spheres which hitherto the Left assumed to be apolitical: a politics of the family, of health, of food, of sexuality, of the body. What we lack is any overall map of how these power relations connect and of their resistances. Perhaps there isn't, in that sense, one "power game" at all, more a network of strategies and powers and their articulations - and thus a politics which is always positional...' (Hall and Jacques p130).

NEW TIMES AND THE INDIVIDUAL

Always positional and always personal. For as Sivanandan points out, the essence of New Times politics is that the personal is political and:



personal politics is about the politics of consumption, desire, pleasure - because we have got a choice now. New Times affords us choices, all sorts of choices, of how to dress, eat, live, make love, choices of style, design, architecture... (p13)

Sivanandan here is at his most acute in his 'personal is political' view of class struggle: the enemy of the black is the white, the enemy of

'How do you extend a politics of food to the hungry, a politics of the body to the homeless, a politics of the family for those without income?'

women is the man, and it ends up that all white men are the enemy of everybody else. The fight against racism becomes reduced to a fight against prejudices, the fight against institutions and practices to a fight against individuals and attitudes.

The promotion of the individual at the expense of the social is a classically petit bourgeois philosophy. For the petit bourgeois stands between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and cannot play an independent role. It seeks to reduce the stature of both by reducing them to collections of individuals. It is then able to cast itself as their equal; for the New Timers, the advent of the information society is even more fortuitous in that they, the intelligentsia, now have a critical role in any social transformation. And as this stratum is also happily blessed with wedges of discretionary income, their personal lifestyles and consumption become not just an affordable option but a positive obsession.

Of course, there is a problem with this political position: in the great conflict with reality, it is the latter which triumphs. As Sivanandan points out, the GLC under Livingstone 'might have succeeded in constructing all sorts of social blocs and movements... to challenge Tory hegemony, but all that Mrs Thatcher had to do was abolish it.' (p18) The New Timers may have dreamed away the power of the state, but has it disappeared in reality? Their blocs and social movements may be tolerated - but only if there is no challenge to the state. So New Timers are very respectable - they may wish to see a campaign against the Poll Tax as one 'point of resistance' to the system, but they will not support non-payment. No challenge, then, to the discretionary income what with fines and so on.

THE PRIVILEGE OF NEW TIMES

But then they have a choice, and choice is the essence of their politics. They can decide when to struggle, and how much or how little. But what of the oppressed? Where is their choice? As Sivanandan says:

'How do you extend a "politics of food" to the hungry, a "politics of the body" to the homeless, a "politics of the family" for those without an income? How do any of these politics connect up with the Third World?' (p18)

is this contempt for the oppressed which is the hallmark of petit bourgeois politics?

geois movements. As Sivanandan says, a women's or black movement which does not derive its politics from the most oppressed of their number must be reformist and élitist: 'Class cannot just be a matter for identity, it has to be the focus for commitment' (p19).

It is a pity that Sivanandan decides not to refer to the *Manifesto for New Times*, published by the CPGB some six months ago, dismissing it as eclectic (p1), since here there is an attempt to spell out the political consequences of their argument. And when it declares that 'Socialism is not an enormous economic almshouse', the last bloc or movement they are identifying with is the most oppressed. The *Manifesto* is not less eclectic than the various contributions; it has the merit for us of being more open and cynical about where it is going.

The individual, then, is what the New Timers wish to resurrect, and that is incompatible with 'statist' solutions. There is no role here for those who are deprived of choice, deprived of purchasing power (Sivanandan p20). Anyway, as he points out later, 'the fulfilment of choice in an unequal society is always at the expense of others and is, in that, a negation of choice, of freedom' (p20). We agree, and add that communists are quite blunt about it: choice for the oppressed can only be at the expense of, at the lack of freedom for, their former oppressors.

The 'return of the subjective' has dismissed the notion of imperialism - the ravaging of the Third World, the theft of its resources, ecological devastation (p22). This is not new. In fact, the starting point for any contemporary revision of Marxism must be the rejection of the concept of imperialism. Back in 1976-77, when we wrote the critique of the then new draft of the *British Road to Socialism* (*Revolutionary Communist* 7) this was a central point. There is no surprise, for the social base for such re-

'Opportunism has a practical, not just an intellectual role, which means that it can only be defeated by political struggle rather than intellectual argument.'

visionism is always a layer whose privileges arise from the exploitation of the oppressed. Of course, such people are distressed at images of famine, poverty and squalor - they are after all sensitive folk. But their answer is not to abolish the curse, but to ameliorate it, not to destroy imperialism (and therewith their choice, their freedom), but to pacify it. Hence their delight at the 'famine' movement. Sivanandan sees through this: all that Band Aid and its ilk did was to shift 'the focus of responsibility for the impoverishment of the Third World from western governments to individuals', and, 'in the language of the new marxists (more or less), a discourse on western imperialism was transmogrified into a discourse on western humanism' (p22).

New Times then for Sivanandan is nothing more than the 'shift from class in and for itself to the individual in and for himself or herself':

'And the self that New Timers make so much play about is become a small, selfish, inward-looking self that finds pride in life-style, exuberance in consumption and commitment in pleasure - and then elevated them all into a politics of this and that, positioning itself this way and that way... A sort of



This review is a discussion article and does not necessarily reflect the views of the FRFI editorial board. We would welcome discussion of it.

All that melts into air is solid: the hokum of New Times A. Sivanandan: *Race and Class* Vol. 31 No.3, Jan-March 1990.
New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s ed. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques, Lawrence and Wishart 1990.

revolution ■ food ■ imperialism ■ post communism ■ post democracy ■ architecture ■ Thatcher ■ imperialism ■ no preference ■ other

the proposed anti-racist march to London in 1980, which the opportunists defeated.

THE NEW VANGUARD: 1979-1981...

1979-81 was a watershed in British political life. The RCG pointed out in a succession of articles that a new vanguard of the working class was appearing: not the old Labour Party or Trade Union leadership, but an oppressed section of the working class, oppressed not just in the economic sense, but in the political as well: black and Irish workers who were suffering racial oppression on top of their exploitation. They were fighting against the imperialist occupation of Ireland, against immigration controls and sus laws, and often as public sector workers, they were fighting against the cuts that the Labour Government was attempting to impose.

Irish and black workers, hitherto amongst the most stalwart electoral supporters of the Labour Party, abstained in massive numbers during the 1979 general election. The anti-imperialist consciousness that was a product of their social and political conditions had led them to the conclusion that there was no value in returning a Labour Government which had tortured Irish political prisoners, had ended special category status, implemented the 1971 immigration act without a murmur. And when 20,000 black people demonstrated against immigration laws in November 1979, their anti-Labour sentiment was clear in their treatment of the likes of Tony Benn.

... AND ITS DEFEAT

These conditions obtain no longer. The small groups that Sivanandan refers to are just that - small. There is nothing on the scale of 10 years ago. That section of the oppressed is not just difficult to organise today (Sivanandan p24), they are at present impossible to organise. That is a result of a political process which took place in 1981 and after. Sivanandan earlier in his critique refers to 'the emerging black middle class of functionaries and intellectuals', individuals 'who could leave the black community to its own problems' and find 'commitment, if not profit, in ethnicity and culture' (p15).

This layer mushroomed after the 1981 uprisings, with the proliferation of community projects sponsored by Labour councils keen to act on the Scarman Report. Although their main concern was to put the lid back on the black communities, they recognised that this was best done using the methods

by which they themselves had been seduced: bribery and corruption. The new black petit bourgeoisie, small though it might be, choosing though it might to live apart from the community, would not abandon it. For if they lost touch with it, what would be the purpose of bribing them? The truth is that they have used their privileged access to influence, funds, resources, not just for their personal gain, but to control any movement that their community might spawn. In short, their acquisition of privilege did not spell the end of their relationship with their community; it put it on a different footing.

The movement of 1979-81 had a potential universality which, if it had matured, could have altered the whole of the political scene of the 1980s. The RCG was aware of this, and argued that it was crucial to prevent the isolation of this new trend. Tragically, that outcome was not avoided, and although our organisation singled out the opportunists of the Labour Party and their supporters in the left as responsible, we were aware at the time of the role of opportunists within the black community itself, even if we chose not to comment on it publicly.

It is this aspect which Sivanandan misses entirely, and the lack of it makes his critique academic, since it appears purposeless. It may make some brilliant points, but to what end? Who is he trying to convince, and for what purpose? He does not seem to accept that opportunism has a practical, not just an intellectual role, which means that it can only be defeated by political struggle rather than intellectual argument. Does not the emergence of a black professional middle class impinge on the ability of black communities to organise themselves, let alone accept communist politics? Their role, along with the likes of New Timers, will mean that Sivanandan's movement will remain small and isolated for the foreseeable future however much they seek to mobilise the spirit of the oppressed.

In conclusion, New Times has codified the standpoint of a privileged stratum of the new petit bourgeoisie. The fact that its basic principles are accepted by movements as apparently diverse as Kinnockism, feminism, the Green and peace movements, sections of the black movement, attest to its universality as the expression of their interests. As British imperialism sinks deeper into decline, its defence of privilege is being undermined. But we as communists recognise that however precise our critique of it is, only in political struggle will it finally be defeated.

Women's rights

In defence of Simone de Beauvoir

The memory and reputation of Simone de Beauvoir, who died in April 1986, are now being called into question following the publication of her private correspondence with her life-long partner Jean Paul Sartre. The press, particularly in France, is having a field day rooting around in letters clearly never intended for publication. De Beauvoir's major crime appears to be the fact that she was free in her sexual attitudes and behaviour, bisexual and rather scathing about some of her young lovers. MAXINE WILLIAMS defends her political reputation.

The danger is that such facts, which have no relevance to anyone but those intimately involved, should now be used to discredit one of this century's foremost contributors to the struggle for women's liberation. This is doubly ironic because Sartre's sexual goings on are legendary and, as is usually the case with intellectual men, have bolstered rather than diminished his reputation.

For a woman of course, things are different. And for a woman socialist and exponent of women's liberation, apparently even more different. Especially so now that all progressive ideas are under attack and the women's question has been safely reduced to the banality of the *Guardian* Women's page.

It is therefore necessary to defend her from the bourgeois gossip-mongers who like nothing better than examining the bedsheets of great public figures, in order to say, 'Ah, really just like us'. De Beauvoir was a leading French political intellectual. She not only produced important literary works but put her politics into practice. She participated in the French Resistance. At the height of French chauvinistic hysteria about the war in Algeria she publicly, and dangerously, opposed French repression of the Algerian struggle. The Vietnam war saw her taking the same anti-imperialist stand. At a time when abortion was illegal in France she led a demonstration for the liberalisation of abortion laws and publicly admitted that she had had an abortion.

But her greatest achievement was the publication of *The Second Sex* in 1949. This became the classic statement of the material and social basis of women's oppression. Its scope – historical, economic, political, literary, psychoanalytical – is immense.

In *The Second Sex* she set herself the task of making a thorough critique of those schools of thought which argued that women's destiny is inevitably determined by physiological, psychological, or economic forces; to show how the concept of woman has been fashioned and to describe their position in the world. 'Thus we shall be able to envisage the difficulties in their way, as endeavouring to make their escape from the sphere hitherto

The Second Sex ... became the classic statement of the material and social basis of women's oppression. Its scope is immense

assigned them, they aspire to full membership of the human race.'

She, unlike some current schools of feminist thought, did not wax sentimental about the nature of women; did not ascribe to them greater strength, stronger inclinations to peace and nurturing than the male sex. Such arguments seem indeed to be the reverse side of the coin that justifies women's inferior position by reference to their biological nature. De Beauvoir said:

'Crises of puberty and the menopause, monthly "curse", long and often difficult pregnancy, painful and sometimes dangerous childbirth, illnesses, unexpected symptoms and complications – these are characteristic of the human female ... In the history of women they play a part of the first rank and constitute an essential element in her situation ... But I deny that they establish for her a fixed and inevitable destiny. They are insufficient for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes; they fail to explain why woman is the Other; they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role for ever.'

To more modern ears it may seem that she overstates the case of women's weakness. It makes no matter: 'Certainly these facts cannot be denied – but in themselves they have no significance. Once we adopt the human perspective ... whenever the physiological fact (for instance, muscular inferiority) takes on meaning, this meaning is at once seen as dependent on a whole context; the "weakness" is revealed as such only in the light of the ends man proposes, the instruments he has available, and the laws he establishes.'

Human beings are animals but something more as well – 'individual possibilities' depend upon the economic and social situation. Thus she wrote in *Force of Circumstance*: 'I never cherished any idea of changing women's condition; it depends on the future of labour in the world; it will change significantly only at the price of a revolution in production.'

But we must take care not to distort her position which, whilst materialist, was critical of the classical Marxist explanation for the existence of women's oppression. She criticises Engels for saying that women's oppression arises only from the existence of private property. Rather, arising from her existential views, she argues that within human consciousness itself is a category which creates the Other and seeks to dominate it. Thus:

'It is not enough to say that the invention of bronze and iron profoundly disturbed the equilibrium of the forces of production and that thus the inferior position of women was brought about ... it is because she did not share his way of working and thinking, because she remained in bondage to life's mysterious processes, that the male did not recognise in her a being like himself ... she seemed in his eyes to have the aspect of the Other ...

All these poems are well worth reading and an inspiration. In 'Black Woman', Nancy Morejón (Cuba) powerfully traces the people's roots from slavery, through revolt and the building of the revolutionary movement. In the last verse, the fruits of the struggle are realised:

I came down from the Sierra
To put an end to capitalism and usury
to the rule of generals and the bourgeoisie

Now I am: from today what we have and create

is vital and our own.

Ours is the land

Ours the sea and sky

Ours the magic and vision

Ours in equality, as I watch you

dancing around the tree we together

planted for Communism.

Its prodigal wood resounds with

the future.

Auriel Ferm

the male will to power and expansion made of women's incapacity to curse.'

However, de Beauvoir agrees that historically 'woman was dethroned by the advent of private property' and traces this process with great skill and insight.

To exploit the new possibilities that arose in the bronze and iron ages man began to keep slaves. He gained wealth and:

'Everything he gained he gained against (woman); the more powerful he became, the more she declined. In particular, when he gained ownership of the land, he claimed the ownership of woman ... from the day when agriculture ceased to be an essentially magic operation and first became creative labour man realised that he was a generative force; he laid claim to his children and his crops simultaneously.'

The antagonism of the sexes, further, is not merely a matter of class conflict and therefore will not automatically be abolished through the abolition of class society.

'We must not believe certainly that a change in woman's economic condition alone is enough to transform her, though this factor has been and remains the basic factor in her evolution; but until it has brought about the moral, social, cultural, and other consequences that it promises and requires, the new woman cannot appear.'

Along the way in *The Second Sex* she delivers some painful blows to various branches of bourgeois thought. Thus on psychoanalysis: 'It is among the psychoanalysts in particular that man is defined as a human being and woman as female – whenever she behaves as a human being she is said to imitate the male'. Freud believed that women suffered from penis envy, 'that woman feels she is a mutilated man'. De Beauvoir is scathing: 'this outgrowth, this weak little rod of flesh' is not envied but

women's condition will change ... only at the price of a revolution in production

freedoms and privileges accorded its possessors are indeed enviable. 'When a little girl climbs trees it is according to Adler, just to show her equality with boys; it does not occur to him that she likes to climb trees ... To paint, to write, to engage in politics – these are not mere "sublimations"; here we have aims that are willed for their own sake.'

It is precisely in her affirmation of the potential of humanity – male and female – that de Beauvoir's strength lies: 'When we abolish the slavery of half of humanity, together with the whole system of hypocrisy that it implies, then the division of human beings will reveal its genuine significance and the human couple find its true form.'

The position of woman has changed significantly since *The Second Sex* was written. As material conditions have improved for a good proportion of the population of imperialist countries a kind of pseudo-liberation has taken place. Woman wears shoulder pads in the boardroom, still always wearing seductive lingerie beneath – 'still a woman' we are told. The burden of domestic labour and childcare still falls squarely on the woman. For the majority of the world's population poverty is a nightmare reality and for women bearing a double yoke, an unbearable agony. De Beauvoir's message is as relevant now as the day it was written. ■



Women's poetry of resistance

Lovers and Comrades – Women's resistance poetry from Central America, ed. Amanda Hopkinson, The Women's Press, £3.95, pp 143.

This is an anthology of poems written by women from Cuba, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala and Costa Rica, many translated here into English for the first time. Young and old women, nurses, mothers, teachers, fighters and leaders in the struggle for liberation and socialism. The poems are categorised into six different sections, that include 'In the Struggle', 'Lovers and Comrades', 'Roots of My Song', and shot through them is the ever-present, life and death struggle of the people of Central America.

Some of the poems are painful and bitter. Rocío América (El Salvadoran revolutionary worker, now in exile) writes in her poem 'Life is So Short': 'In my country/time is measured in corpses:/it's now five-dead-to-twelve,/it's thirty-dead-past-four ...' And just days before her murder on 22 March 1979 by security forces in El Salvador, Delfy Gómez Fernández wrote: 'It will be my pleasure to Die ... since both history and the future/are on our side/I cannot swerve from this path ...'

In post revolutionary Cuba and

Nicaragua during the Sandinista decade, all people are encouraged at some time to write and express themselves through poetry. Cuba's 'Houses of Culture' and Nicaragua's mass alfabetización programmes enabled the people to become literate and develop writing skills. One of the most memorable poems in this collection is by María Pineda, described as a Nicaraguan worker.

Orlando

I remember you, my son,
brave and darling,
hoarse from shouting so loud on
demonstrations,
in your brown-striped T-shirt,
the one we keep in the second
drawer.

10 • FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM! APRIL/MAY 1990

The Education Reform Act 1988 (ERA) is gradually being put into place. It claims to provide the basic skills of literacy and numeracy efficiently. It will introduce competition into schools at every level and control the curriculum to minimise teacher input. In reality, it will reinforce an elitist education system. SUSAN DAVIDSON examines the two principle changes, the National Curriculum and Local Management of Schools (LMS). These innovations are statutory, that is, required by law for all but the private schools.

The present education system is already dire for the majority of working class children. Many school buildings are in a state of disrepair or need basic improvements, redecorating and new facilities. Most are badly maintained, drab and unpleasant institutions. Truancy is estimated at half a million pupils every day. Widespread bullying and indiscipline are clearly symptoms of the failure of schools. Numeracy and literacy rates are so poor that they have been condemned by the Confederation of British Industry - the bosses' union.

There is a massive contradiction between the complaints of the employers about the standards of education and the interests of the state in keeping the system as cheap and limited as possible. Thatcher is about to impose her solution to these competing interests.

Britain is not a meritocracy. Power is still in the grip of a small ruling class. The fact is that Britain is a decaying industrial power with a large finance capital and service sector. It is a parasitic state living off the exploitation of other nations and content to maintain a pool of reserve labour at home as a growing proportion of the working class. Thatcher is concerned to enforce some order on this situation.

All the current education indicators confirm this view. The narrow ruling class elite still runs the higher echelons of the Civil Service, banking and financial institutions, the law and the armed services. Over 50% of Oxbridge students come from a handful of public schools.

STANDARD
Only 14% of the population go on to Higher Education. This compares with 70% in the USA and 79% in the USSR, East and West Germany. It is significant that in South Korea and Singapore 65% attend higher education.

About 40% of school children leave with no qualifications, this rises to over 60% in some inner city areas. Nearly 50% of A level students drop out of the exam. Only 12% of university undergraduates are from semi-skilled or unskilled manual worker backgrounds - a figure which remains the same as it was in 1912.

Social democrats, Fabian reformers and Tory meritocrats alike have long been agitated by this last fact. They cannot bear the idea that the nation should waste so much talent in the working class. Scholarships were introduced in the 1920s to encourage the 'brightest and the best' to get to university. But it was the 1944 Education Act that was intended to provide a more general educational opportunity for working class children to climb up the ladder to university entrance.

The 'all-age' Elementary Schools were replaced by separate secondary schools. The 11+ exam was introduced to filter pupils through to Secondary Modern School (70%) Technical (Central) Schools (20%) and Grammar Schools (10%). Academic exams were available at the Grammar, and craft certification at the Technical School.

Most schoolchildren were excluded from public examinations. This was seen to be increasingly unsatisfactory during the period of the post war boom when a massive expansion of production took place in the USA, Japan and West Germany. When Labour won the election in 1964, Harold Wilson promised to release the talents and energies of 'millions of our people' in order to prepare for what he called 'the second industrial revolution'.

A SKILLED AND FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE

The comprehensive school was to be their tool to attack the bastions of diehard Tory privilege and speed up the production of a newly skilled and flexible workforce. Under Wilson, and later Edward Heath, a massive increase of expenditure on education took place.

Teacher training was improved by a three year course with places for 40,000 a year by 1968. Polytechnics were set up as degree-conferring bodies run by the local authority and open to mature students with no previous qualifications. In 1970 the school leaving age was finally raised to 16.

Yet this period of expansion failed to deliver the results expected, much to the annoyance of Tory and Labour governments alike. The initiatives developed by those who were struggling with the day to day problems of working with poor children were regarded as a diversion.

'Child-centred' education, 'discovery methods' and other innovations were preferred by educationalists and teachers to the old rote learning. Special payments were needed to keep teachers in inner city schools and the Home Office was lobbied to provide Section 11 money for teachers of bilingual pupils.

The change that progressive teachers most wanted was to break the iron grip of 'O' level exams as a prelude to 'A' level exams and university entrance. The Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) with its emphasis on course work and teacher input was seen as a step in this direction. It remained, however, a second-rate examination for working class candidates who could not succeed with the narrow rigours of 'O' level. The present GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) is an academic examination which now replaces both previous examinations.

Inevitably there was a violent swing away from the expansionist liberal education programme as the post war boom came to a halt in the early 1970s.

Under Callaghan the Labour government cut education expenditure. Shirley Williams as his education minister launched the 'Great Debate' on the future of education in an attempt to exert central control.

The Labour government had two aims, to justify the cuts and to wrest back the initiative from teachers and their supporters. They promoted vocational and applied skills at the expense of the broad humanities curriculum. The 1975 White Paper, *An Approach to Industrial Strategy*, stated that 'education must have a role in creating a high wage, high output, high employment economy'. In 1976 Callaghan said,

'There is no virtue in education producing socially well-adjusted members of society who are unemployed because they do not have the skills'.

ENTERPRISE, COMPETITION & PRIVATISATION

But it was left to Thatcher to pave the way for the wholesale regularisation of elitist education. She introduced the Education Reform Act in a climate of enterprise, competition and privatisation.

ERA centres around a compulsory National Curriculum which has to be taught to all up to the age of 16. The DES has designated the ages of 7, 11, 14 and 16 as Key Stages 1, 2, 3 and 4. Continuous Attainment Target tests will be set throughout each stage for



Hugh Myddleton School in London at turn of the century - is this what Thatcher wants?

Education in the 1990s

each subject. The results of these tests, the Statements of Attainment, must be made public and published in rank order together with the results of all public examinations.

Many teachers who initially welcomed the National Curriculum are now in despair. At first sight it seems highly desirable that a National Curriculum including science, a language, technology as well as the humanities, English and maths should be available to all up to the age of 16 years. But two facts have become clear.

Firstly, the Tory government is determined to limit the subject matter of the syllabus in order to control what is being taught in schools. There has been in particular bitter controversy over the history syllabus with the government insisting that British history must be central. Teachers responded that ex-Education Minister Kenneth Baker wants to introduce a conservative political view into the classroom. There is an authoritarian right-wing bias to many other areas of the National Curriculum.

Secondly teachers now know that there is to be poor provision for science, technology and language teaching and the whole of the core curriculum is under-resourced.

It is now increasingly seen that the main purpose of the National curriculum is to minimise teacher input and maximise external testing. Testing and recording required by law will consume most of teachers' time and energies. An English teacher at Key Stage 3 will have to register approximately 14,000 test results a year.

Thatcher and Education Secretary Kenneth Baker talked about public accountability of teachers and schools as the reason for the publication of exam results and Statements of Attainment. The real reason is to be found in the second aspect of ERA, the move to the Local Management of Schools (LMS).

Under LMS the administration of schools will be transferred from the Local Education Authorities to the Heads and Governors of the school itself.

Each school Governing Body will receive funding from the local authority, 75% of which is to be spent on 'pupil driven' expenses, that is, teachers and equipment. The remaining 25% of the funds will be used to put out tenders for building refurbishment, cleaning and catering and buying into specialist services such as computer networks, sport or psychiatric educational support etc.

The formula for the grant is based on the average teacher cost in the borough or area. Schools with an older established staff will lose out to schools with younger cheaper teachers because they will receive only the average cost per pupil for the area. The differences are enormous. It has been suggested that pupil-driven 'cost' averages out at £640 a year in Kent and £2,000 a year in the London Borough of Westminster.

Heads and Governors are to 'manage' a wide area including teacher recruitment and pay differentials. However, they have a statutory duty to provide the National Curriculum. Parents can legally complain if individual teachers, Heads or Governors are considered to fail to deliver the National Curriculum.

The introduction of LMS will mean open enrolment by which parents can choose any school for their children. Together with the compulsory publication of all test and exam results a league table of schools will soon emerge in each area and in rank order. Pupils (and the money that goes with them) will choose to attend the most successful schools. Others will soon have a shrinking register which will rapidly make them 'un-economic'. It will be a constant and unremitting struggle to attract students and retain staff in order to receive sufficient funding to keep the school open.

EDUCATION

The DES has made it clear that schools will be expected to supplement their income by fund-raising and sponsorship from the local business community. Schools in London have been told to make separate arrangements with local suppliers and bookshops following the demise of the Inner London Education Authority. The job description for the Deputy Headship of one of the largest comprehensive schools offers a one year contract and states that fund-raising is the main responsibility. Schools are preparing to 'sell themselves' and emphasis is being put on the production of brochures, video presentations and public relations.

Even the most successful schools will be in competition with nearby 'opted-out' schools which receive their funding direct from central government and have more affluent pupils. These institutions in turn will be in rivalry with the new CTC's, Thatcher's lavishly-endowed City Technology Colleges set up by the DES. All of course will be ranked lower than the privileged private schools of the ruling class.

As Minister of Education Thatcher was an enthusiastic supporter of the comprehensive school. In 1975 she boasted that she had extended opportunities to children from deprived backgrounds. By 1984 she speaks of 'the top 25% who would go to the grammar schools, the top 2% of the eighteen-year-olds who would fetch up in the universities'.

The new Education Act that Thatcher and Baker have cooked up is designed to provide the basic skills as cheaply and efficiently as possible. Those who fail even at this level will simply drop out of the system. Those who succeed will be subjected to constant testing and control. The ability of teachers to influence what or even how they teach will be severely limited. A new ruthlessness has been added to the old elitism of British education. ■



COLONEL KELLY



CAPTAIN DEASY

The First International and Ireland

(This is the final article in a three part series on the First International.)

Their dramatic change of view on this question was of enormous significance not only for the British working class but also, more generally, for the international working class movement. In particular, as capitalism entered its imperialist phase and opportunist currents began to dominate working class movements in the more developed capitalist countries, it was a pointer to the increasing significance of national liberation struggles of oppressed peoples for the working class struggle for socialism.

IRELAND AND THE BRITISH REVOLUTION

Before 1848, Marx and Engels thought Ireland would be liberated as a result of the victory of the working class movement in Britain. Deeper study had convinced them that the opposite was true. The British working class would never accomplish anything until it had got rid of its present connection with Ireland. Ireland is the key to the British revolution.

They reached their new position on the basis of a concrete analysis of the relationship between Britain and Ireland. That relationship significantly changed over a 20 year period. The national liberation movement in Ireland assumed revolutionary forms with the rise of the Fenian movement – a 'lower orders' movement based on the land. The working class movement in Britain not only lost its revolutionary drive with the defeat of the Chartist movement in 1848 but also fell under the influence of the liberal bourgeoisie for a long period of time.

The British ruling class was divided into two main sections – the old landed aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. Ireland was not only a bastion of power and wealth for the old landed aristocracy but it was a point of unity of both sections of the British ruling class. For the bourgeoisie also benefited from British domination over Ireland. Ireland was not only a source of cheap food and raw materials for British capitalists but also the impoverished Irish peasantry driven off the land and forced to emigrate to England was a source of cheap labour. This forced emigration of Irish people divided the working class in Britain into two hostile camps. It allowed the ruling class to provide a relatively superior position for British workers as against the Irish and so support and nourish the hostility between these two sections of the working class. This antagonism between British and Irish workers, argued Marx and Engels, 'is the secret of the impotence of the English working class despite its organisation'. For the oppression of Ireland united the ruling class and divided the working class.

The British ruling class was most vulnerable in Ireland where the power of the landed aristocracy was being challenged by a revolutionary national movement based on the land. A defeat for the British ruling class in Ireland would open the way for the British revolution. Provided, of course, that the British working class 'made common cause with the Irish'. The national emancipation of Ireland was the first condition for the British revolution. And unless the British working class made common cause with the Irish',

Over 120 years ago, through their work in the First International, Marx and Engels established that the question of Irish self-determination stands at the heart of the British revolution. It was at that time that they first publicly argued and fought for their changed position on the issue of Irish liberation and its relation to the struggle of the British working class.

the British working class would never accomplish anything.

Marx made the further point that 'landlordism in Ireland is maintained solely by the English Army'. It alone prevents an agrarian revolution taking place. And that Ireland was the only pretext for the English government retaining a big standing army which, if need be, could be used against English workers after having done its military training in Ireland. A point of some significance for our understanding of the Irish question today.

Marx and Engels' support, through their work in the First International, for the Irish liberation movement had 'other objects' besides opposing the brutality of English rule on the grounds of 'sympathy' or 'international justice'. These 'other objects' were precisely to separate the policy of the working class with regard to Ireland most definitely from the policy of the ruling class. Only by making 'common cause with the Irish' and taking the initiative in dissolving the Act of Union could the working class lay down the basis for its own emancipation. This was inevitably to put Marx and Engels into conflict with those opportunist leaders of the English labour movement who wanted to follow Gladstone and the leaders of the liberal bourgeoisie. The Irish question then as today posed the very practical question of the struggle against opportunism in the British labour movement.

THE FIRST INTERNATIONAL AND IRELAND

Marx and Engels not only regarded the Irish question as critical for the class struggle in England but also internationally. England, the dominant world power at the time, was the only country in which the material conditions for a workers' revolution had developed up to a certain degree of maturity. To hasten the revolution in England, Marx said, 'is the most important object of the International'. The sole means of doing this is to make Ireland independent. The task of the International, therefore, was to put the 'conflict between England and Ireland in the foreground, and everywhere to side openly with the Irish'.

Below: an eviction of an Irish peasant family in the 19th century. Top right and top left, Kelly and Deasy who escaped on 18 September 1867.



The International took up the Irish question on many occasions. It played a leading role in defending the Irish liberation struggle and fighting for the rights of Fenian prisoners.

In 1865 the Fenians made plans for an armed uprising but due to the activities of informers this did not take place, and some of the leaders of the movement were arrested. Fenian newspapers were suppressed and Habeas Corpus suspended. The General Council of the International supported a campaign started in England in defence of Fenian prisoners. It made sure that wide publicity was given to the barbaric treatment of Irish prisoners, and it supported appeals to collect funds for families of Irish prisoners.

In February-March 1867, the armed uprising, for which the Fenians had long prepared, suffered defeat. Many leaders were arrested and put on trial. On 18 September 1867, in Manchester, an armed attack on a police van was organised to release two Fenian leaders. Their escape was a success but during the clash a police officer was killed. Large numbers of Irishmen were soon arbitrarily rounded up. Five were put on trial for their lives accused of killing the policeman. In this patently rigged trial they were all found guilty and sentenced to death. A wave of protest in England and Ireland took place. Marx and his supporters won the International to a call for the commutation of the death sentence.

In defending their stand on the Irish question in the First International, Marx, Engels and their supporters came up against the opportunist leaders of the British labour movement who at that time were moving closer to Gladstone and the leaders of the liberal bourgeoisie. They were forced to deal with political attacks on the Irish liberation movement which have recurred ever since. These included those of the 'English would-be liberators' who thought Fenianism 'not altogether wrong' but wanted the Irish movement to use the 'legal means of meetings and demonstrations...' by which the English movement conducted its struggles. Supporters of Marx and Engels argued that the Irish had every right to use force since

force was used to deny them their freedom.

A bitter debate took place in the Reform League – a movement for Suffrage reform which had six members of the General Council on its standing committee – over a letter written by its President, Beales, which, while approving the objections of the Fenians, had condemned their tactics. He was attacked by members of the League's Council, and most strongly by its members who also sat on the General Council of the International – Lucraft, Odger and Weston – who defended the use of force by the Fenians. A widespread attack by the press on the Reform League followed and, in particular, on Lucraft and Odger who were prominent trade union leaders, for encouraging Fenian assassins. Pressure was put on them to withdraw their statement by the bourgeois radical leaders of the Reform League. And at the next meeting of the League's Council they went back on their position, claiming that they had been misunderstood.

Nevertheless there was great support among the working class for the Fenians as Engels stated in a letter with much approval:

'...the London proletarians declare every day more and more openly for the Fenians and hence – an unheard-of and splendid thing here – for, first, a violent and, secondly, an anti-English movement'.

In spite of the widespread campaign, three of the Fenian prisoners were brutally executed.

The next major campaign on the issue of Irish prisoners occurred towards the end of 1869. The International helped organise a mass demonstration in London, estimated at nearly 100,000 people, in support of the demand for amnesty for Irish political prisoners. When Marx, in supporting this call, accused Gladstone 'of deliberately insulting the Irish Nation' and attacked the conduct of his government, this attack was clearly too much for some of the English members of the General Council. Odger objected to demands for 'unconditional release' of the prisoners and argued that while he

himself was for their release, 'it is impolitic to proceed in that way, it prejudices the case'. He also defended Gladstone. Marx's reply is a political guideline for today: 'it is more important to make a concession to the Irish people than to Gladstone'. Finally Marx and Engels faced defenders of British rule over Ireland who argued that Ireland could not be independent because it would undermine the security of Britain.

Three English trade unions left the International because of its principled position on the Fenians. While this certainly shows the political bankruptcy of these unions, the debates also show the important effect which Marx and Engels' revolutionary stand in support of the Irish had in combating the political influence of the opportunist leaders of the British labour movement.

NATIONALISM AND INTERNATIONALISM

There is still one more important dispute which took place in the International on the Irish question. At the Council meeting of 14 May 1872, John Hales, an English trade unionist and secretary of the General Council, opposed the formation of Irish nationalist branches of the International in England. He argued that such branches went against the 'fundamental principle of the Association' which was 'to destroy all semblance of nationalist doctrine'. Further the formation of Irish branches in England 'could only keep alive that national antagonism which... existed between the people of the two countries'.

Engels' reply to Hales is of great importance. His essential argument was that in the case of the Irish, true internationalism must necessarily be based on a distinct national organisation which had as its first and most pressing duty the national independence of Ireland. He argued that it was an insult to Irish working men to ask them to submit to a British Federal Council. The Hales notion was put and lost with only one voting in favour. Engels' intervention had prevented the International undermining its own cause among Irish workers.

Engels' intervention was to be clearly vindicated in November 1872 when the Irish members of the International in London organised a massive demonstration in Hyde Park to demand a general amnesty for Irish prisoners. All London's democratic organisations were contacted and a committee which included three General Council members (an Irishman, Englishman and German) was set up. Two days written notice had to be given of such meetings indicating the names of speakers. The Irish refused and the committee agreed.

The massive 35,000 strong demonstration went ahead as arranged, the first Irish demonstration to be held in Hyde Park. It was also the first time the English and Irish sections of the International had united in solidarity. That this could happen was due to the principled support of the Irish people's struggle for freedom in the First International and particularly due to the influence and stand taken by its communist leadership, Marx and Engels.

David Reed

Strangeways – Stop the brutality

'Stop the brutality. We are not taking it anymore. We are up here because we have had enough of being treated like this... We are not animals, we are human beings.' LORNA REID reports.

This was the message from the roof top of Strangeways prison in Manchester on Sunday 1 April. 1000 prisoners took control of the prison on Sunday morning. Having taken over the Chapel and gymnasium area, keys, taken from a prison warden, gave the prisoners access to the rest of the prison and many of them broke onto the roof. From there they displayed their demands on banners – one read 'No Poll Tax' – and relayed their messages through a megaphone to the press and media. At the time of writing the prisoners have unfurled a banner proclaiming 'No Dead' in response to rumours of three to 12 prisoners being killed.

The Strangeways uprising is in response to a report by the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Judge Stephen Tumin, released a week before. Tumin praised the prison authorities for 'improvements' made and concluded there was 'more to praise than to decry.'

Strangeways is one of the most overcrowded prisons in Europe. A Victorian building, it is designed to hold 972 inmates. When Tumin visited in July last year it held 1,625

inmates – 509 of them unconvicted. On Sunday 1 April it held 1,660.

Prisoners are held three to a cell and the majority are locked in their cells for hours a day. None of the cells have integral sanitation, each prisoner is allowed just one shower a week, throughout the prison there is a shortage of socks, towels, vests and underpants. Most prisoners rarely leave their cells save for slopping out, weekly showers, collecting their meals and one hour's exercise in a dirty yard. None of the prisoners have access to the prison's gymnasium or library and Category A remand prisoners are denied access to the canteen. Prison officers are notoriously racist towards black and Irish prisoners and are renowned for their brutality.

Strangeways is a hell hole. On the first evening of the revolt, a bystander at the prison told *FRFI* 'If they kept animals like that it would have been knocked down years ago.' The Tumin report, however, whilst highlighting the appalling conditions in the prison, failed to condemn the inhuman treatment of prisoners and, instead, chose to praise the authori-



ties for 'improvements'. The prisoners have demonstrated that they will take no more. On the evening of 1 April 100 prisoners at Hull Prison refused to return to their cells after an exercise period and three climbed onto the roof of a cell block. As we go to press 130 prisoners still retain control of Strangeways prison and more staff have been drafted into Wands-

worth, London, where staff have described the situation as a powder keg. Stop the brutality! Victory to the prisoners!

If prisoners' mail to *FRFI* is not interrupted, in our next issue, we will print their own accounts of the revolt against the Strangeways prison regime.

Tottenham 3: fight continues

On 13 March Sharon Raghip held a six-hour vigil with her six year old son, Don, outside the Police Complaints Authority, London, calling for an investigation into the conviction of her husband, Engin who was convicted with Mark Braithwaite and Winston Silcott of killing PC Blakelock on Broadwater Farm in October 1985.

She told *FRFI* that the 'vigil was called because the PCA have directed disciplinary charges against Chief Superintendent Graham Melvin who was in overall charge of the investigations into the Broadwater Farm disturbances. The report has not been made public. We are demanding that it is made public. In the recent judgment given in the court of appeal concerning the Guildford Four it was stated that anything which casts doubt on the integrity or the professionalism of any officer involved obviously throws the convictions into doubt more. So, therefore I think it is essential that access is given to either Engin's lawyer or for the Home Secretary to ask for the report himself.'

Through her campaign for justice, Sharon has come into contact with Irish political prisoners and their families. She told us that 'Breida Power, the daughter of Billy Power – one of the Birmingham Six – has become a very close friend. Also I have spoken to Paul Hill and had contact with his family. There is also the connection that Gareth Pierce, who is Engin's solicitor, was also one of the Guildford Four's solicitor and is a solicitor for one of the Birmingham Six. There are a lot of things in common between all the cases.'

The picket was followed by another on Monday 19 March outside the Home Office where more than 25,000 petitions calling for the reopening of the case were handed in. 19 March was the third anniversary of the convictions.

Lorna Reid.

INSIDE NEWS

CONVICTION

The first edition of the *Conviction* newsletter has just been published. It is written by Mike Shankland, who lives in Sheffield, and Martin Foran, who is currently in Frankland prison (see *FRFI* 92) and who has just begun a hunger-strike to draw attention to his framing by the West Midlands police. *Conviction*'s aim is to support framed prisoners and encourage campaigning against 'miscarriages of justice'. To contribute either information or money or both or to request a copy of the newsletter or publicity for your own fight, write to *Conviction*, PO Box 522, Sheffield, S1 3FF.

ROY IVERS

On 26 January, Roy Ivers, already serving 14 years for an armed robbery he did not take part in, was given a further seven for attempted escape. From the dock he read out a statement which emphasised that with no justice available through official channels, an innocent man wrongly incarcerated has no alternative but to try to free himself.

PRISONERS BIRTHDAYS

15 April: Martina Anderson D25134, H Wing, HMP Durham, Old Elvet, Durham, DH1 3HU.

17 April: Eddie Butler 33867, HMP Frankland, PO Box 40, Finchale Avenue, Brasside, Durham DH1 5YD.

20 April: Patrick Hackett 342603, HMP Parkhurst, Newport, Isle of Wight, PO30 5NX.

28 April: Martina Shanahan P37693, H Wing Durham.

LONG LARTIN PRISON FORUM ON RACISM

Prisoners unite in common struggle

It is never possible to enter a prison, even as a visitor, without a feeling of depression. Long Lartin is no exception. However on 6 March a strange reversal took place. Having attended a forum on 'Race Relations in Prison' in Long Lartin, leaving the prison at the end of the day was, oddly, more depressing than entering. For the day had witnessed a remarkable event – an open forum at which prisoners had been able, for once, to express their views. The unity, discipline and ability displayed by the prisoners made it an occasion which lifted the spirits considerably and it was a wrench for the two members of *FRFI* editorial board to leave those who had organised and participated in the event, locked up.

In the closed and repressive world of prison administration it was indeed unique for authorities to agree to a discussion with about 60 interested outsiders, 50-60 prisoners and others present. That they did so is not a sign of their growing liberalism but rather is testament to the struggle the prisoners have waged over past years. For without that struggle, without the threat of large scale unrest, the Home Office would not have felt compelled to agree to the forum. Of course, the Home Office hoped to gain a public relations victory from the exercise. But that does not, in any way, devalue the prisoners' achievement in forcing the forum to be held.

Nor does it undermine the value of the forum itself. The fight for prisoners' rights requires a struggle on many fronts, taking many and varied forms. This political struggle between prison authorities determined to deny prisoners' rights, and prisoners determined to win them, was at the heart of the day. Despite the limits set on the debate, the prisoners were able to argue their case with great force and develop their political arguments and unity. The forum also allowed the Birmingham Six to be interviewed on radio – no small victory. The prisoners made it a hot day for the authorities and placed clear limits to the public relations potential of the event.

The Home Office position was represented by a consultant on race relations, Mr Satish Malik. He spoke

of initiatives to improve race relations but was lamentably vague about any concrete steps or even in identifying the problems. It was the prisoners and some of the outside contributors who got down to brass tacks – the problem was not race relations, it was racism. Racism on the outside which meant that more black people went to prison, racism on the inside leading to discrimination and abuse. Racism was institutional in the prison system and indeed was used as a tool to divide prisoners. If you were big-hearted you might almost have felt sorry for Mr Malik who, as the day wore on, increasingly resembled a Fourth Division goalie facing Liverpool's forwards.

That racism has its roots in society outside prison was stressed by two of the invited speakers, Michael Reid on behalf of the Society of Black Lawyers and Kathy McDermott, a prison researcher at the University of North Wales. Present at the forum were John Walker and Hugh Callaghan, two of the Birmingham Six, and a PLO prisoner, Fahad Mihyi. On behalf of the Irish in Britain Representation Group, Pat Reynolds argued that to understand racism we have to understand colonialism and the criminalisation of communities. He pointed to the frame ups of the Guildford Four, the Birmingham Six and the Maguire family.

Maxine Williams, representing the Terry O'Halloran Memorial Fund, asked why anyone should listen to

Home Office talk of reform when in the same room two of the framed Birmingham Six sat, kept in gaol for political reasons.

The PLO prisoner and his comrades said that them being in prison was a direct result of Britain's policy of supporting the occupation of Palestine. They complained of the denial of phone calls to family for overseas prisoners, on the spurious grounds of cost – another example of the racism they suffered. Deportee prisoners also spoke, saying they were truly the forgotten prisoners.

Whilst the Home Office wanted a safe discussion of 'reforms', the realities of British prison life, its racism and brutality, constantly intruded. Julie Walsh of *FRFI* raised the question of deaths in custody and of the eleven prisoners who had died in mysterious circumstances between 1973 and 1985.

The right of prisoners to representation and involvement in any initiative to confront racism in prison was the central issue throughout the debate. Prisoners quizzed Satish Malik on why they had not been informed of the existence of the Regional Race Relations Coordinating Group and why they did not have their own representation on such a body.

Reporters from workgroups, without exception, said that none of the prisoners had even been aware of a race relations officer in the prison. Maxine Williams reported that a prisoner had heard it rumoured that the officer was called Mr Robinson. Maxine called for Mr Robinson to stand up so he could be identified. There was an anxious hush as everyone present gazed round the room to have a look at Mr Robinson. But he was not there. A member of the prison staff reported that he had been present in the morning but had gone home to get some sleep as he had been working a nightshift. The prisoners jeered this announcement and another prisoner said that they would be

able to take the Home Office's initiatives more seriously if Mr Robinson had arranged his time so he could be present throughout the forum.

The Home Office consistently denies the right of prisoners to respond in a collective manner without fear of retribution. John Bowden exposed the real situation faced by prisoners when he said, 'We can't address racism in prison whilst prisoners are powerless. When prisoners raise a complaint of racism they are harassed, victimised and repressed.'

Joe Whitty, the ex-governor of Long Lartin, admitted publicly at the forum that he was a racist. During a workshop session, he insisted that governors had no power to allow prisoners' representatives to participate in race relations committees within the prison. This was a lie. In the final plenary session it was revealed that, whilst prisoners' involvement was an 'evolutionary thing', governors do have discretion to involve prisoners on such committees.

The prisoners at Long Lartin – black, white, Palestinian, Irish and others showed they could rise above all efforts to divide them. They are united by the fact that they have a common struggle – for prisoners' rights. Of all groups, prisoners face the most difficulties in organising. Their room to organise is so slim, yet at Long Lartin they used it to good effect.

Towards the end of the day a Home Office representative revealed himself in the audience, where he had sat quietly all day watching Mr Malik dodging the flak. He said he had listened and would report back what had been said, particularly about the need for greater consultation with prisoners. He also said the Home Office was committed to improving race relations. Some will judge by whether the Home Office allow these forums, of which this was the second, to continue in their present form.

Julie Walsh and Maxine Williams

The sanctions debate

In four recent publications an array of anti-apartheid researchers present their findings and recommendations for sanctions policy*. They throw light on the shifting relationship between the imperialist powers and apartheid. ANDY HIGGINBOTTOM examines them.

SOUTH AFRICA'S TRADE

The first consequence of imperialism in Africa is an incredible accumulation of wealth and power in the hands of white South Africans. In 1985 South Africa's Gross Domestic Product was US\$67.7bn. The total for all the other 17 African countries south of the equator was US\$43.7bn, less than two thirds (*Banking on Apartheid* p73). Concentration of capital underlies South Africa's role as an auxiliary power for imperialism with its own economic base.

1980 and 1985 direct investment doubled from R12.3bn to R27.9bn; indirect investment quadrupled from R13.7bn to R55.5bn over the same period. Recovery in the world capitalist economy had an adverse effect on gold earnings which had fallen to US\$317 an ounce in 1985. South Africa's foreign debt had reached US\$24bn, a 293% increase in terms of the sharply diminishing rand.

THE DEBT CRISIS AND SANCTIONS

Expansion of the apartheid economy, and the corresponding ability of the white ruling class to operate independently of the major imperialist powers, is conditioned by objective economic constraints; the white supremacist state needs technological imports, loans and gold revenues to survive.

But the critical factors are political. Black people's resistance to sham reforms, culminating in the insurrections of 1984/85, elicited solidarity action. In the USA a popular black-led movement for divestment pushed banks and corporations with apartheid links onto the defensive. Chase Manhattan was the first to refuse to roll over payments due from its South African debtors. The much-trailed 'crossing the Rubicon' speech on 15 August signalled to the world's bankers only that PW Botha was set against reform. Politics had triggered the debt crisis. Shares collapsed, the rand crashed and US banks seized South African assets in security. Pretoria closed all foreign exchanges, declared a moratorium on the repayments of US\$10bn short term debt and reintroduced the two tier exchange rates for the financial and commercial rand.

The sanctions movement was still to peak. In October 1986 the US Senate finally overcame Reagan's veto and enacted the Comprehensive Anti-Apartheid Act. Within two years US-South African trade was cut by 39%, the shortfall being more than compensated by the USA's rivals West Germany and Japan (see Table 1). Table 1 shows a moderate reduction in the UK's imports from South Africa in 1987, which had shot up again by 1988. The UK's non-gold trade totals US\$2.6bn. A fuller picture must include South Africa's gold exports (see Table 2). Gold provides a vital component in sustaining an overall trade surplus, US\$7bn in 1987, of which some US\$3bn was routed through the London market.

The world recession 1979/80 played into Pretoria's hands. Because of its role as the international money commodity, gold exchanged for ever greater currency equivalents. During 1980 it topped US\$800 an ounce. South Africa deployed these windfall profits in massive operations to circumvent arms sanctions and the oil embargo. Before long additional loans were required to finance the state's nuclear energy, coal-to-oil conversion and armaments programmes.

Increasingly, the weight of international investment in South Africa shifted from direct investment in companies' own subsidiaries to indirect investment: loans. Between

DISINVESTMENT

60% of all US corporations with direct investments in South Africa decided to withdraw (see Table 3).

TABLE 1: SOUTH AFRICA'S MAIN TRADING PARTNERS
(Monetary Gold Excluded)

Country (83-85 ranking)	Total trade		Imports from SA		Exports to SA		Trade balance (6 months)	1988/1987 (%)
	1987	1987	Increase US\$m	1987	Increase US\$m	1987	Increase US\$m	
	US\$m	US\$m	US\$m	US\$m	US\$m	US\$m	US\$m	
Japan (2)	4,148	2,280	34	1,868	22	-412	13	
West Germany (3)	3,798	1,242	30	2,546	28	1,304	50	
USA (1)	2,715	1,420	-39	1,565	-31	-125	23	
UK (4)	2,654	1,089	-10	1,295	2	476	38	
Italy (5)	2,249	1,791	10	458	3	-1,333	n/a	
France (6)	1,051	583	-8	468	1	-115	39	
Taiwan (10)	874	451	115	423	102	-28	110	

* Exports to SA - Imports from SA

** Increase of first 6 months 1988 over first 6 months 1988

Source: *Sanctions Report* pp214, 235, 252

TABLE 2: EFFECT OF SANCTIONS ON TRADE TRENDS

	Imports from SA			Exports to SA			Total change
	1983-85 average US\$m	1987 US\$m	Rise/ fall (%)	1983-85 average US\$m	1987 US\$m	Rise/ fall (%)	
All Trade (except monetary gold)							
Sanctions 9*	3,481	2,230	-36	2,931	2,047	-30	-33
Rest	7,278	9,938	37	10,445	10,293	-1	14
Monetary Gold	6,374	7,130	12				12
Totals	17,133	19,298	13	13,375	12,340	-8	4

* USA, France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Nordic countries.

Source: *Sanctions Report* p213

TABLE 3: DISINVESTMENT FROM SOUTH AFRICA AND HAMIBIA
(Numbers of Corporations to end 1987)

Country	Disinvested or Disinvesting No	Remaining		
		No	No as % of Country's Original Total	No as % of International Total Remaining
Australia	17	8	32	1.2
Canada	24	12	33	1.8
France	7	15	68	2.3
West Germany	10	128	93	19.2
Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Denmark	15	27	64	4.1
Switzerland	2	32	94	4.8
United Kingdom	99	266	73	39.9
United States	271	178	40	26.7
Totals	445	666	60*	100.0

* Of the 1,111 foreign corporations known to have had equity investments in South Africa, 60% remain.

Source: *Financial Links* p74

For many the loss of business at home was too great.

Capital movements into and out of South Africa are exchanged for foreign currencies at the financial rand rate. This provides a disincentive for withdrawal of capital funds. The ratio of financial rand to the commercial rand is an index of disinvestment sentiment. Companies would have to take up to 40% losses to get their capital out.

US corporate disinvestment therefore often took a sneaky form, (Duncan Innes' article in *Sanctions Against Apartheid* pp226-239), reducing public profile but in practice keeping up the profitable links through management buy out arrangements. Coca Cola shifted its syrup plant to Swaziland, licensing the bottling to South African satellites. IBM, General Motors and many companies adopted such licensing agreements. Those companies which were sold off to domestic conglomerates accelerated the centralisation of South African capital. Anglo-American picked up Barclays Bank subsidiary, the majority interest in Fords and the South African subsidiary of Citicorp bank, putting it in control of 60% of all shares quoted on the Johannesburg stock exchange.

UK disinvestment up to the end of 1987 was much lower. 73% of British companies remained, leaving Britain the world's biggest direct investor in apartheid with 40% of all foreign-owned subsidiaries.

Nevertheless the international pressures for disinvestment hurt the racist minority. New investment, burgeoning in the early 1980s, had been brought to an abrupt halt.

ECONOMIC ROOTS OF DE KLERK'S POLICY

Since 1985 surpluses in South Africa's balance of trade have been insufficient to compensate for capital flight. In 1988 despite a trade balance of R11.9bn, offset by net invisibles of -R9.0bn making a current account balance of R2.9bn, Pretoria lost R3.6bn in foreign reserves. Capital totalling R6.7bn had left the country. The regime estimates that it will need to generate current account surpluses of R5bn a year to meet loan repayments. The apartheid regime is under a financial squeeze. Unlike his predecessor, FW de Klerk has come to terms with this reality. Reliance on

'the best candidates for initial sanctions are South African bulk exports of commodities of which there is an ample supply on the world market'. In the second phase nearly all imports and exports would be stopped and, 'there would have to be effective penalties on countries that refused to participate'. This is wishful thinking. South Africa's main trading partners are mutually hostile brothers. Such a programme posits the need for political movements in each of the imperialist powers challenging their own imperialism from within, as happened for a period in the USA. None of the studies pursue this issue.

A chapter on Britain and the Commonwealth in *Sanctions Against Apartheid* seeks to explain 'the lull in sanctions pressure since the peak of 1985-6', but fails to answer the critical question. How is that Thatcher got away with her anti-sanctions policy? An analysis that examines why the Anti-Apartheid Movement and Labour Party failed to even dent Thatcher's stand is required (see *South Africa: Britain Out of Apartheid - Apartheid Out of Britain*, an FRFI pamphlet).

Banking on Apartheid ends by discussing a common theme - the impracticality of imposing a sanction on gold. Yet the authors acknowledge that 'South Africa is crucially dependent on gold'. If potentially so damaging, why do gold sanctions get relegated? To move against gold would cripple apartheid; it would also rapidly undermine the stability of world finance and wreak havoc in international payments. It would threaten imperialism.

Tacit limits have been placed on sanctions. *Apartheid and International Finance* argues that,

'The financial sanction is almost ideal, because although in some cases backed by governments, it is by and large a sanction that market forces work to encourage'.

The point is completely one-sided: financial sanctions have only been applied under the pressure of popular action and were relaxed as soon as the banks were able to do so. Market forces can transmit pressures for reform - they cannot end apartheid.

The sanctions debate as posed in this limited way simply misses the reality of what is at stake in the struggle for black liberation. The central conflict between the interests of the black majority and white domination cannot be resolved by reforming apartheid. Apartheid must be destroyed. And since apartheid is the form that capitalism had to take in South Africa, the elimination of apartheid requires and will carry in its wake the destruction of the capitalist system.

* *Apartheid and International Finance: A Programme For Change* by Keith Ovenden and Tony Cole. Published by Penguin £4.99 ISBN 0 14 012835 2
Banking on Apartheid - The Financial Links Report by an Inter-Governmental Group of Officials. Published by The Commonwealth Secretariat in association with James Currey. £4.95 ISBN 0 85255 341 2
Sanctions Against Apartheid edited by Mark Orkin. Published by CIIR £7.99 ISBN 1 85287 058 3
South Africa: The Sanctions Report by an Independent Group of Experts. Prepared for The Commonwealth Committee of Foreign Ministers on Southern Africa. Published by Penguin. £4.99 ISBN 0 14 052396 0

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by Lorna Reid

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against it requires going
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'Why do the Irish hate us?'

On Sunday 18 March the right wing *Mail on Sunday* published an article by pro-Thatcherite John Junor. The article was entitled 'Why do the Irish hate us so much?' and described the refusal of an Irish judge to extradite Republican volunteers Dermot Finucane and James Pius Clarke as 'most insulting'.

Well, Mr Junor, I am sure that the North Irish Catholic working class did not see it that way. In fact I am sure that the North Irish Catholic working class breathed a sigh of relief that the Irish ruling class did not betray them again as it has done for the last 200 years. We have seen that the solution to the North Irish 'problem' will never come from Britain. The solution can only come from the Irish Republican Army and Sinn Fein who are the representatives of (and answerable to) the Catholic working class and not the Anglo-Irish bourgeoisie who are the representative of (and answerable to) imperialism.

SELMAN ANSARI

Middlesex

SWP and RCP cross picket line

Despite a demonstration called by the Manchester Martyrs Commemoration Committee and the RCG demanding 'No platform for racists' – and ignoring protests by a member of the executive of the Students Union, SWP Central Committee member Pat Stack, speaking on behalf of the Time To Go initiative accepted an invitation from Manchester Polytechnic Debating Society to discuss Irish politics with loyalist MP for 'East Londonderry', William Ross.

A lively picket was formed before the meeting began demanding that no platform be given to Ross thus depriving him and his corrupt loyalist politics any credibility. Picketers argued with people going in and many of them joined the demonstration. Not so the SWP and RCP.

First across the picket line were the SWP. Senior members of Stockport and Manchester branches rudely pushed past us, refusing to listen to our argument.

The RCP also pushed their way through, claiming they were going to 'smash his arguments' – implying, in their arrogance, that the only reason Irish freedom has not been achieved is because they have yet to find the correct arguments to defeat British imperialism.

William Ross was rushed into the building under a police escort and was called a murderer by angry demonstrators.

The demonstrators called for Pat Stack to come and talk to the picket before talking to Ross. Several messages were sent to him, even by members of the SWP sympathetic to the 'no platform' demand. But, apparently Stack knows best. He must have got into the building by the back door, because it was reported that the debate went ahead, without heckling or disruption and both parties were reported to have been in the bar together at the end 'with no animosity whatsoever' between them. No word from Stack to the demonstrators.

The senior SWP members were asked by *FRFI* for a comment but they stated that they did not feel the need to explain themselves to *FRFI*. The SWP would rather talk to a loyalist MP than communists, Republicans and picketers.

How low will they eventually stoop?
ED JAY
Manchester

LETTERS

US attacks on Cuba

Impperialism is intensifying all forms of aggression against Cuba to end 30 years of living proof that socialism is the future.

Last December seven shots were fired at a Cuban border patrol near the Guantanamo US naval base on the island. The Cuban ambassador to Panama was arrested four times and his embassy surrounded by the US occupation forces. For over 24 hours on 30-31 January a US coast guard cutter harassed and attacked the Cuban merchant ship *Hermann*. US officers claimed the *Hermann* was carrying drugs. Its captain and crew of ten refused to surrender to a US inspection: unarmed, they defied machine gun fire to prevent a piratical boarding. The deck, bridge and engine room were riddled with bullet holes. When the *Hermann* reached Mexican waters the crew submitted their vessel to an inspection by Mexican authorities who confirmed it was clear of drugs. This serious international incident received almost no mention in the British media.

In clear breach of international law governing telecommunications, the US government is launching TV Marti aimed at Cuba from US territory this spring. Its purpose is to foment opposition to President Castro and the Cuban government

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among the Cuban people. This is to be done with a mixture of lies about Cuba and the 'American dream'. Cuban authorities have offered a programme exchange with the US, but the US

government has turned a deaf ear to this proposal. Despite a detailed presentation of the legal case against TV Marti, the US government is going ahead. Cuban engineers have vowed to fight back: a Cuban television broadcast of a Fidel Castro speech appeared on Miami TV.

An exemplary call for solidarity with the Cuban people was made by Arthur Scargill at a miners' rally in South Kirkley, Yorkshire on 17 March commemorating the deaths of David Jones and Joe Green on picket lines during the 1984-85 Miners' Strike. 'Over the next few months you will see mounting pressure on Cuba from the United States of America. Never in the history of our class has there been a bigger need to defend the Cuban Revolution, which was sustained, and has been sustained, by ordinary men and women in that society.' He went on to call for the removal of the Guantanamo base. Scargill's statement shows there is real potential for principled internationalism and solidarity with Cuba in the British working class. Let's mobilise it.

TREVOR RAYNE
London

Join the action join the RCG

• A movement must be built in Britain in solidarity with the struggling peoples of Ireland, South Africa, Palestine. Help us to do this – **Join the RCG!**

• A movement must be built here in Britain which stands with the oppressed fighting racism, repression and poverty. Help build this movement – **Join the RCG!**

• A movement must be built which challenges and defeats the treachery of the opportunist British Labour and trade union movement – **Join the RCG!**

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GDR – Capitalism's revenge

In their crowing over the

disintegration of the socialist bloc

in Europe, the Western

imperialists are particularly

triumphant over the collapse of

the GDR.

While Thatcher and Bush have come round to the view that a stable, large USSR under Gorbachev with US-style presidential powers supplanting the position of the Communist Party, provides the best conditions for Western investment and profit-making, they still agree with Chancellor Kohl that nothing less than the destruction of the GDR will do.

Even before the GDR came into existence in October 1949, the western powers tried to destroy it. The continuation of the anti-fascist struggle in the Soviet occupation zone for three years after the West had dropped the Nuremberg trials, the pursuit of fascists and reparation payments to the USSR and Poland, all this struck at the very root of the capitalist class in Germany. They unilaterally set up a capitalist Federal Republic which refused even to recognise the post-war borders.

The GDR committed three other unforgivable sins: it gave assistance to Third World liberation movements, sending doctors and engineers to Vietnam, it outstripped many developed countries by 1970 becoming one of the world's top ten industrial economies despite scant resources and enormous war

devastation and achieving a national income level above the UK and New Zealand, and finally its social provision put all the capitalist countries to shame.

Already in 1965 UNESCO ranked the GDR as having the best child care facilities in the world and in the mid-70s the West German magazine *Der Spiegel* was forced to concede that the GDR had a comprehensive education system which took school leavers,

women and those wishing to educate themselves while still in full or part time employment, something which did not exist in the West.

The chorus of western commentators are all shouting with one voice that the socialist system has proved itself inferior to capitalism, even the GDR which could not sustain its social provision as its economy collapsed.

What we have seen over the past year with the destabilisation of socialism has not been the triumph of a fair competition with the West that they would have us believe.

The collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe has been accompanied by the sight of Outspan oranges in East Berlin and of apartheid Foreign Minister Pik Botha in Budapest. Socialism is a superior system but it has started from a position of disadvantage. To win we must unite with the movement against imperialism. Capitalism cannot stand still. To get out of its crisis it must destroy the GDR, Cuba and any other force which stands for this unity.

PAUL MCKINLEY
South London

FIGHT RACISM! FIGHT IMPERIALISM!



What we say

The Poll Tax is an attack on the poorer sections of the working class. It is a transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. It is unjust, undemocratic and has been imposed on an unwilling population.

The Poll Tax was intended to be a party political attack by the Tories on Labour-controlled councils. Through a process of withdrawing grants from these councils and ignoring the special requirements of inner city areas, the Tories have already forced massive cutbacks in local services, inflicting serious hardship on working class people. The Poll Tax continues this process by reducing even further government estimates of the spending needs of each local authority and district council.

To maintain minimum services nearly all councils, Tory and Labour, have had to set Poll Tax levels way above government assessments. This is a dual attack on the working class - inadequate services and exorbitant taxes. This is the reason why millions of people are angry and are determined to fight against the imposition of the Poll Tax.

Thatcher and her henchmen knew that their systematic attack on the working class would meet resistance. That is why over an 11-year period the police have been reorganised into a well-organised, intensively-trained specialist riot force to be deployed swiftly and ruthlessly to put down any and all signs of resistance.

The responsibility for the violent confrontations between police and demonstrators outside the town halls in March as Poll Tax levels were being set, and at the battle of Trafalgar Square during the 200,000 strong anti-Poll Tax demonstration must squarely be placed at the feet of Thatcher and her riot-trained police.

Inevitably, Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, the British Labour Party, not only rushed to condemn the fightback of demonstrators, but led the baying pack calling for retribution and 'exemplary' sentences. In power the Labour Party will pursue the working class with as much venom, hatred and brutality as the Tories.

That the organisers of the demonstration, the Militant-controlled All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation, attacked the demonstrators who fought the police as 'mindless people', shows them to be squarely on the side of the bourgeois state against working class people.

An anti-Poll Tax federation led by such people can go nowhere and is being abused by Militant to further their ambitions and future careers in the Labour Party.

The Revolutionary Communist Group does not and will never condemn the violence of the oppressed against the violence of the oppressor. We believe that political demonstrators have the right to fight back against the brutal attacks on them by the police. We reserve our condemnation for the violence of the Poll Tax and the government which imposed it.



The battle of Trafalgar Square

'No Poll Tax!' was the chant of thousands of working class youth as they stood firm against lines of riot police armed with shields and truncheons in Trafalgar Square on Saturday 31 March. LORNA REID was an eyewitness to events.

In a mass response against the Poll Tax, 30,000 marched in Glasgow and 200,000 people in London on demonstrations organised by the All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax Federation (ABAPTF). The demonstration in London was broken up by police on horseback as the last half of the march made its way towards Trafalgar Square. The attack began outside Downing Street where 1000 people staged a sit-down.

The police, determined that Downing Street should not become the focal point of protest, attacked demonstrators who attempted to pull down police barriers in order to reach Downing Street. Mounted police drove demonstrators towards Trafalgar Square. Simultaneously, police on foot prevented another section of the march, approaching from the



Police rioters attack the marchers

Strand, from entering the Square. Demonstrators, determined to complete their demonstration, pushed through police lines. Most of the police retreated. Those left behind were pelted with placard-sticks and empty cans from people who had earlier climbed up onto nearby scaffolding. The police assault began in earnest. Riot vans fitted with security mesh drove recklessly into the crowds at speed. The crowd regrouped in front of the South African Embassy and chased off the riot police deployed at the gates of the racist embassy. The police found refuge inside the embassy, which in turn came under a hail of stones and traffic cones thrown by protestors. But it was the charge of police on horseback from the foot of the Strand up to Charing Cross Road and back again which forced the demonstrators to take serious measures to defend themselves. Men and women, pensioners and children scattered, terrified. The police horses were driven directly into the path of a woman. She fell under the horses and it was left to the demonstrators to rescue her.

A barricade was built to prevent further charges, railings were uprooted and the road was broken to provide stones. Hundreds of young people engaged in hand to hand fighting with mounted police and police in riot gear. A portacabin blazed on scaffolding overlooking the square; a display window on the South African Embassy was smashed and a fire started. As police charges forced demonstrators along Charing

Cross Road and St Martin's Lane, cars were overturned and set alight, shop windows were smashed and Westminster County Court was set on fire. Police riot vans bore the scars of sustained assaults. Demonstrators driven by police into the heart of London's West End took out their revenge on symbols of privilege and wealth - exclusive shops and expensive restaurants in Regent Street were attacked.

More than 300 people were arrested by police snatching squads and dozens injured. Many of the arrests were completely random as the police hit out and grabbed people who were running to escape the charge of police horses and reckless driving of police



Demonstrators on the march

RCG member Richard Roques was arrested, beaten and charged with Criminal Damage and Violent Disorder, which carries a mandatory prison sentence. Following his release from police custody Richard said, 'I was standing outside the South African Embassy when police in riot gear jumped on me, threw me to the ground, smashed my head on the pavement and lay on top of me. They threw me in the van, my face covered in blood, and poured lighter fuel all over me. I was left in the cell for two hours without medical treatment. The five men in my cell had all been snatched in a similar fashion whilst they had been standing around doing nothing.'

The 200,000-strong anti-Poll Tax demonstration, the largest ever, had been attacked and broken up by the police. The demonstrators had bravely fought back to defend both their right to demonstrate and to protect themselves from brutal assault.

As soon as the news broke out, politicians queued up to condemn the violence - not of the police but of the young people who fought back - Home Secretary David Waddington for the Tories and Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley for Labour, followed by the aspiring career politician from Militant, Tommy Sheridan, chair of the ABAPTF. Waddington described the demonstrators as 'hooligans' and accused them of acting under the influence of drink; Kinnock condemned the 'minority' for 'causing this dangerous uproar' and said that 'they should be dealt with severely'. Echoing his leader Roy Hattersley described it as 'the work of mindless hooligans' and said 'I hope there have been substantial numbers of arrests and the sentencing is severe... exemplary'. He called on all 'Democratic Parties' to 'stand shoulder to shoulder in their mutual condemnation of this violence'. Tommy Sheridan, interviewed on ITV's News at Ten said 'We do not condone it [the violence]... We condemn the violence... it was the work of 200-250 mindless people.'

From the Tories through to the self-proclaimed leadership of the anti-Poll Tax campaign, the venom of the attacks was consistent. All of them sought to blame a 'mindless minority'. But the truth is that the vast majority of demonstrators were prepared to defend themselves and support others in resisting the police assault. ■



A building in the Square was set alight